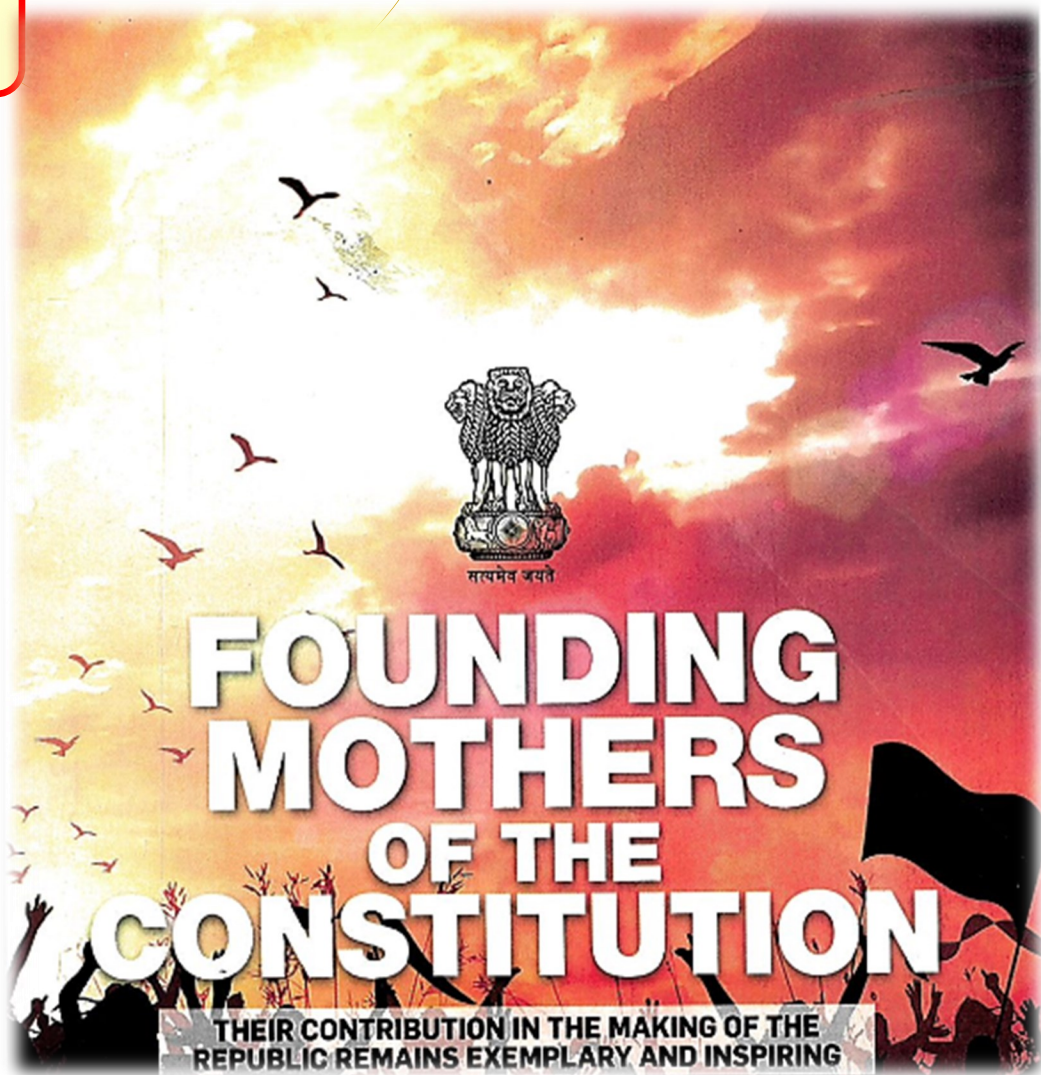


FOUNDING MOTHERS

The **FIFTEEN WOMEN**

of Constituent Assembly



Faculty of Law

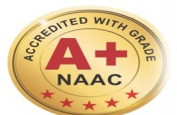


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Fifteen extraordinary women

of the Constituent Assembly not
only helped draft the Constitution
but also laid the foundation
for a democratic and
inclusive India.

Their life stories brim with courage and vision as
they defied existing norms to lead feminist and
freedom movements, often facing arrest.

Each of them represents
a unique facet of India's
struggle for independence
and its commitment to
social justice



TEXT PRATUL SHARMA
ILLUSTRATIONS JOB P.K.

THE FIFTEEN WOMEN

of Constituent Assembly

Prof Dr R Gomathy Sankari
Head - Dept of Law
Prof Dr S Ramalingam
Joint Registrar - Languages



Faculty of Law



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THE FIFTEEN WOMEN

of Constituent Assembly

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Dedication



Prof BR Ambedkar

Foreword

The fact that there were FIFTEEN WOMEN who contributed to the making of Indian Constitution is highly appreciable.

The Constituent Assembly of India was formed to frame the Constitution of India. It was elected by the 'Provincial Assembly'. Following India's independence from British Government in 1947, its members served as the nation's first Parliament. Of the 389 members of the Indian Constituent Assembly, 15 were women.

The women members of the Assembly were Ammu Swaminathan, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Jivraj Mehta, Kamla Chaudhry, Leela Roy, Malati Choudhury, Purnima Banerjee, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Renuka Ray, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Annie Mascarene. They were lawyers, reformists, and freedom fighters and most of them were part of the feminist movement.

Most of the women that constituted the Assembly belonged to the upper caste, upper class and were literate. Out of the 15 women, only one was Muslim and another Dalit. The then United Provinces sent four women, the highest number of women to the Constituent Assembly. G Durgabai (Madras), Begum Aizaz Rasul (United Provinces) and Renuka Ray (West Bengal) spoke the most in the Assembly debates.

The zeal and contribution of the women members of the Assembly to discussions and debates on issues ranging from reservations to the Uniform Civil Code were unparalleled. Their contributions had a significant impact on several issues, such as gender equality, individual freedoms, decentralization, and social justice.

This book - The FIFTEEN WOMEN - makes a simple and humble attempt to portray these women [Founding mothers of Indian Constituent] to the younger generations of the 21st century who would know and appreciate. Brief details of these women have been

provided with relevant and interesting details. Also, the book provides some 20 pictures of the Constituent Assembly covering the discussion, signing, etc.

Aptly, the book is dedicated to Dr BR Ambedkar. It is well-known that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's irrefutable authorship of the preamble covers the intellectual origins of its six most central concepts-justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity, and nation. Also, it is clear that its central concepts have their provenance in Ambedkar's writings and speeches.

The book is published by the Faculty of Law of our university. The effort put by the compilers (authors) of the book is highly appreciated.

Prof Dr GC Kothandan
Executive Director - Legal
Dr MGR Educational and Research Institute

Preface

"I raise up my voice - not so I can shout, but so those without a voice can be heard... we cannot succeed when half of us is held back."

<<< Malala Yousafzai [Nobel Laureate]

Contribution of women in the areas of education and philosophy can be traced back to the Vedic period where some women were regarded as rishis or seers, particularly those who composed hymns in the Rik Samhita. Some of the noted women scholars who made their mark in philosophy were Maitreyi, Gargi, Lopamudra, Ghosha and Apala. There were women who made their mark in several movements like the Bhakti Movement. The saint poets like Mirabai, Andal, etc., through their compositions, have enriched vernacular languages and literature. Their works are of relevance even today and are composed into classical and folk songs.

Few consider the role of women in drafting the constitution, with the focus often on the male "founding fathers" of India. A Supreme Court bench noted the oversight, pointing out that traditional narratives have marginalized women's contributions during the Constituent Assembly debates. The term "founding mothers," cited by Justice Chandrachud in 2018, recognizing the crucial role women played in shaping India's Constitution.

"They made valuable suggestions to improve constitutional provisions keeping in mind the adverse conditions prevailing for women in those days. We read about the contributions of Dr B R Ambedkar, K M Munshi, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar and others. But we were not taught in the school or colleges about the great contributions from Durgabai Deshmukh, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and others. We should give importance to their contributions too," the CJI DY Chandrachud said.

The Constituent Assembly with 389 members, including 15 women, was constituted in December 1946. It debated the provisions of the draft Constitution and finalised it, leading to its adoption on November 26, 1949. Among the 15, Dakshayani Velayudhan, was the first and only Dalit woman to be

elected to the Constituent Assembly. PM Narendra Modi had talked about Velayudhan's contributions in his speech at the Constitution Day celebrations at the Supreme Court in 2022.

In this book - "**The FIFTEEN WOMEN**" - a serious attempt is being made to introduce these women, who really contributed in the enactment of Indian Constitution, to the younger generation of 21st century. Here a Review of the book - "*The FIFTEEN*" - by Aketa Kapoor is provided. Also, an Interview of the authors [Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali] is provided. Chapter 3 offers a 'Brief Profile of these 15 Women'. Detailed information has been gathered from several sources. Relevant Web Links provided therein would take the readers to more details.

Chaper-4 contains some pictures of the constituent assembly covering the debate, signing, etc., The detailed individual profiles of these FIFTEEN WOMEN are available in Chapter-5. Some of the relevant information has been taken from the magazine 'THE WEEK' (2 Feb 2025). The book is dedicated to Dr BR Ambedkar, the father of Indian Constitution.

The book is being published/released on the eve of 114th International Women's Day [IWD] - 8 March 2025.

Prof Dr R Gomathy Sankari
Prof Dr S Ramalingam
{8 March 2025}

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Book Review



BY AEKTA KAPOOR
DECEMBER 5, 2024

Seventy-eight years ago, on December 9, 1946, India's Constituent Assembly met for the first time in New Delhi to begin its historic task of drafting the Constitution for Independent India. Over the next three years, these erudite leaders would put forward and debate multifarious views on the Draft Constitution of India, influencing the way we today in the world's largest democracy live our lives.

The Assembly had 299 members. Only 15 were women.

This year, a new book

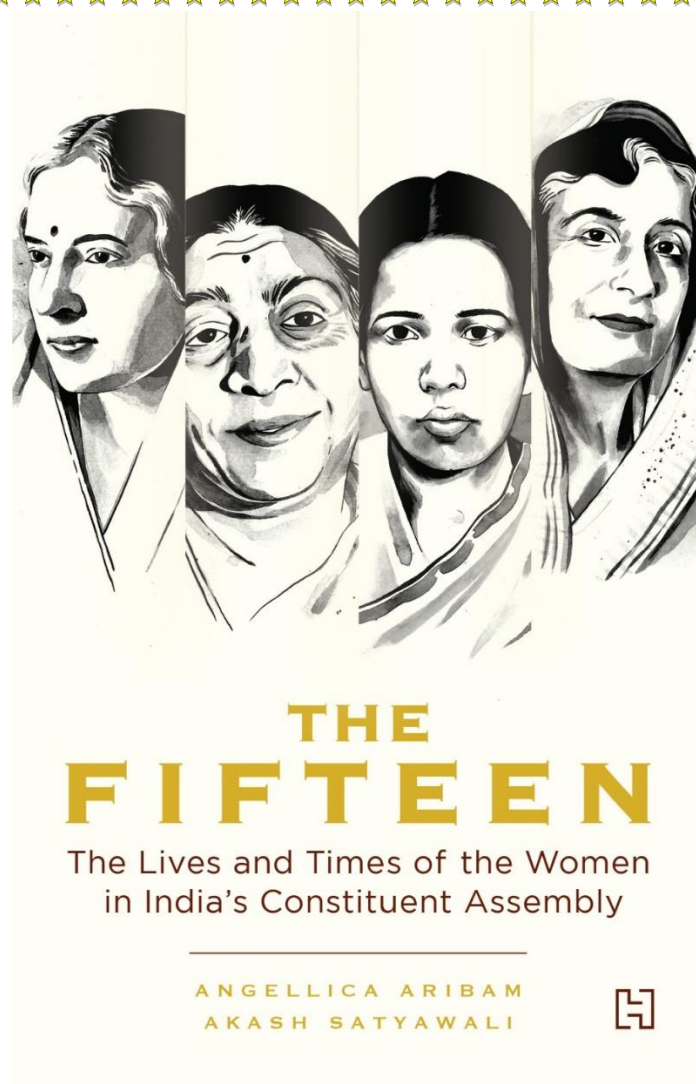
The Fifteen:

The Lives and Times of the Women in India's Constituent Assembly

(Hachette India, INR 799)

by Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali

puts the spotlight on this small group of trailblazers. The portraits offer glimpses into their lives and circumstances, their opinions and worldviews, and their personal and professional struggles as women, as freedom fighters and as nation builders.



THE FIFTEEN

by
Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali (Hachette India, 2024)

The 15 women came from remarkably diverse backgrounds, and yet what brought them together was their intellectual brilliance, passion for social justice, and shared struggles as women in patriarchal societies.

Some of them were born into privilege. Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's parents hailed from the royal families of Punjab and Haryana, and her father was the chief minister of Patiala state. Hansa Mehta and Leela Roy both belonged to educated, progressive families of administrators, educators and social activists, the former from Baroda in present-day Gujarat and the latter from Sylhet in present-day Bangladesh.

On the other hand, Annie Mascarene's family had its roots in a marginalised Latin Catholic fisherfolk community, and Dakshayani Velayudhan's in the 'untouchable' Pulaya caste, both from present-day Kerala. They had to fight the everyday battles of social discrimination and financial constraints while educating themselves and working towards their larger mission for India's independence and the framing of the Constitution.

Despite their differences, all 15 had a fierce will in common.

Interestingly, they also had allies at home – either their own spouses or some other family backing. Take the examples of Malati Choudhury and Ammu Swaminathan, who both lost their fathers as children. Ammu, the youngest of 13 siblings born in Palghat (now Kerala), was 14 years old and home-educated when she married a distinguished lawyer 23 years her senior. Meanwhile, Malati was in her fifth year studying at Visva Bharati – Rabindranath Tagore’s university in Santiniketan – that she met her future husband. In both cases, it was the allyship and unstinting support of their respective husbands that shaped Ammu’s and Malati’s identities as social activists and leaders.



Politician and feminist activist Subhashini Ali holding up a copy of *The Fifteen*, which features her grandmother Ammu Swaminathan (Photo: eShe, December 2024)

Angellica Aribam, a Manipur-origin political activist working on issues of gender and anti-racism, got the idea for this book while going through the Constituent Assembly debates and the speeches of the women leaders. “Their stories are of resistance and hope,” she says. Co-author Akash Satyawali, a public policy professional, adds, “Each of their remarkable journeys tells us about law and polity as well as presents a glimpse into the multiple Indias that existed – in its perfections and imperfections.”

Indeed, as one browses through this well-researched book, one is struck by the tremendous heterogeneity of the nation and its people. Yet, though the women came from varying backgrounds, socio-economic status, religions and cultural milieus, they all faced personal battles on account of their gender. Despite that, they pushed against great odds to reach the Constituent Assembly, where their inputs helped ensure equal

rights for women and the marginalised in the largest and most complex democracy in the world.

Having said that, this book is no hagiography. If anything, it highlights how complicated and difficult it must have been to craft a just Constitution in a country with a multitude of communities, traditions, social systems, languages, faiths and subcultures. At times, even the women leaders disagree with one another – especially on matters of reservation for women and the marginalised.

In addition, some, like Renuka Ray and Sucheta Kripalani, considered more radical forms of struggle, while others like Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Rajkumari Armit Kaur, Sarojini Naidu, Purnima Banerji and others staunchly followed the Gandhian principle of nonviolence.



Authors
Akash Satyawali and Angellica Aribam

This is an important book that puts forth the female experience and worldview in historical literature otherwise dominated by male figures and versions of events. Through the lives and work of these 15 leaders, one gets a nuanced glimpse into India’s colonial past and fraught Independence, and the micro and macro challenges that dotted its path to democracy.

Sadly, as the authors point out, “most of the challenges these women political leaders faced almost a century ago are still prevalent today”. One hopes it does not take another century for India to actualise the dreams of social justice and gender equity envisioned by the 15 women leaders of India’s Constituent Assembly.

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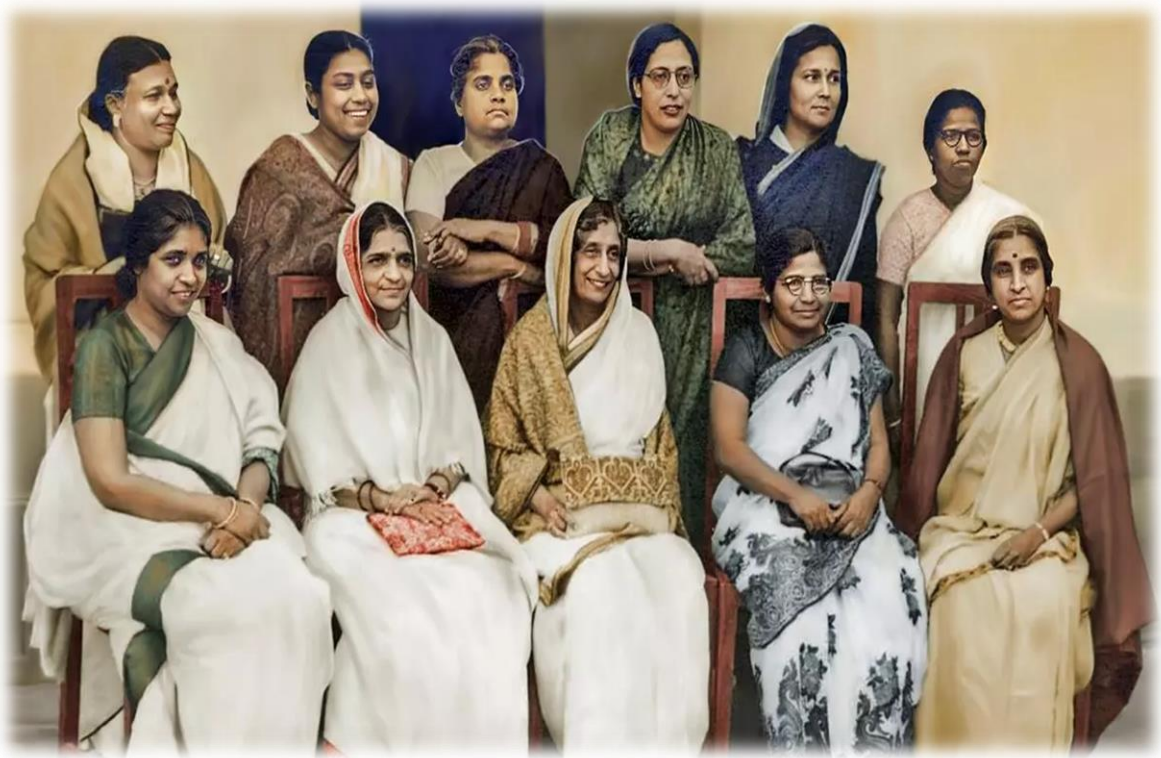
'History books invisibilised contributions of women leaders in forging modern India'

Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali, authors of **THE FIFTEEN**, on how 15 women fought patriarchy and helped shape the world's longest constitution.

<https://frontline.thehindu.com/books/constitution-at-75-history-the-fifteen-women-leaders-constituent-assembly-contribution-legacy/article68832699.ece>



ABHINAV CHAKRABORTY



Eleven of the 15 women members of the Constituent Assembly: back row (standing, from left): Kamala Chaudhri, Sucheta Kripalani, G. Durgabai, Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul, Purnima Banerji, Dakshayani Velayudhan. Front row (sitting, from left): Renuka Ray, Hansa Mehta, Amrit Kaur, Annie Mascarene, Ammu Swaminathan. | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives

On November 26 this year, India will celebrate 75 years of its Constitution. Formulated and drafted after intense debates and meticulous deliberations by the Constituent Assembly over three years (1946-49), the Constitution is a testament to the collective will of pioneering individuals who, despite their numerous differences in matters of society, culture, politics, and policy, came together to produce a living and evolving document that continues to inspire millions to strive for a democracy built on principles of freedom, equality, and social justice.

Of the Constituent Assembly's 299 members, 15 were women. In their book titled *The Fifteen: The Lives and Times of the Women in India's Constituent Assembly*, the authors Angellica Aribam, a political activist, and Akash Satyawali, a public policy professional, chronicle the stories of these trailblazing women and their influences, experiences, and the convictions they stood for, besides their invaluable contribution to the making of the Indian Constitution. In an interview with *Frontline*, the authors contend that while these were "remarkable women but not without their flaws", they navigated extraordinary challenges to leave a lasting imprint.

Edited excerpts:

What inspired you to research and write about these 15 women in the Constituent Assembly? Walk us through your process.

Angellica Aribam: The idea of this book came to me in 2018 when I was going through the Constituent Assembly debates as a way of dealing with a mental health episode. I came across a speech by Begum Qudsia Rasul wherein she called reservation a "self-destructive weapon". As a representation activist, I didn't agree with her but I was very intrigued. I wanted to know more about her and the other women members—who were they, what was the sociopolitical climate that shaped their worldview, what were their politics, and why did they do the things they did. It soon became a rabbit hole.

Unfortunately, there was a lack of information about these women leaders. Our history books have invisibilised the contributions of women leaders in forging modern India, and it didn't feel right. Therefore, I reached out to [co-author] Akash and we decided to embark on this journey. Our attempt with this book is to provide the reader with a comprehensive knowledge of the women behind India's Constitution and a window into

the world wherein these women navigated extraordinary challenges and left lasting imprints.

You describe how Ammu Swaminathan confronted Dr B.R. Ambedkar over women's representation in the Hindu Code Bill committee, prompting laughter from male members. How pervasive was such sexism in the Constituent Assembly, and how did these women navigate/manage it?

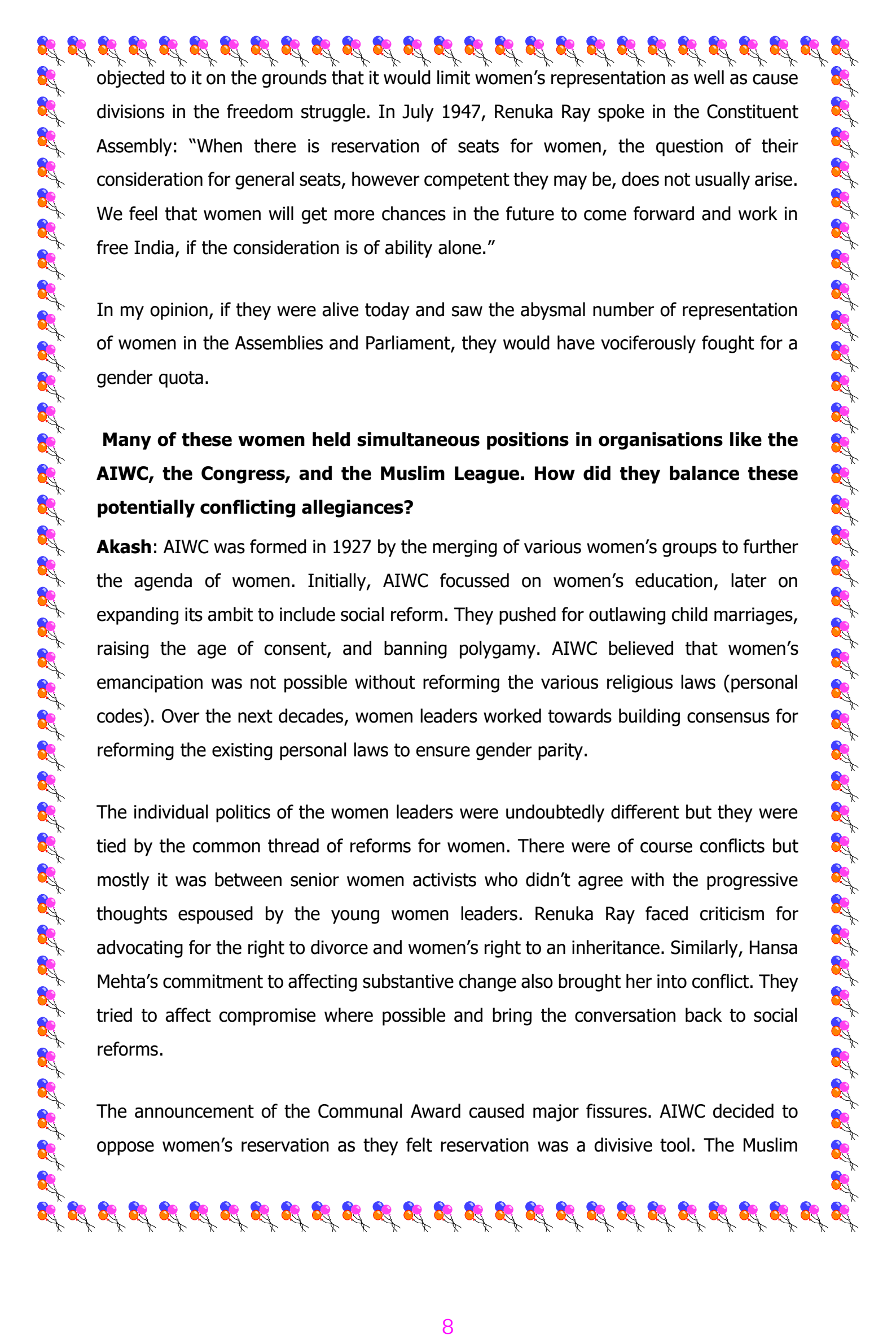
Akash Satyawali: Parsing through the debates, we find that sexism was very common. A male member, Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, rose and called for "protection against women", essentially implying that recognising women's rights put men at a disadvantage. The fierce opposition to the Hindu Code Bill, which was seen as a vehicle for religious reform and women's emancipation, shows how patriarchal the environment was.

Renuka Ray wrote in her autobiography how Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was the binding factor amongst the women members. All of them regularly met, ideating on the way forward regarding women's rights. It helped that most of them had been members of the All-India Women's Conference [AIWC].

*Published by Hachette India, **The Fifteen** brings alive the history of the Indian Constitution in rich detail and pays tribute to the undeniable contribution of women to the Indian republic.*

In 1952, Constituent Assembly member Annie Mascarene noted women comprised only 5 per cent of Parliament in the First Lok Sabha. Today, that figure stands at 14 per cent. What has perpetuated this low representation? How do you view the Women's Reservation Act in light of some of the Fifteen's scepticism toward gender quotas?

Angellica: There are several issues at play here. Ingrained patriarchy and the inability of men to cede space are two prominent roadblocks leading to the low representation of women in politics. Sexism is prevalent in the political system even seven decades after independence. It is to be noted that the subject of a gender quota in legislative bodies was extensively discussed in the Constituent Assembly. But the women members



objected to it on the grounds that it would limit women's representation as well as cause divisions in the freedom struggle. In July 1947, Renuka Ray spoke in the Constituent Assembly: "When there is reservation of seats for women, the question of their consideration for general seats, however competent they may be, does not usually arise. We feel that women will get more chances in the future to come forward and work in free India, if the consideration is of ability alone."

In my opinion, if they were alive today and saw the abysmal number of representation of women in the Assemblies and Parliament, they would have vociferously fought for a gender quota.

Many of these women held simultaneous positions in organisations like the AIWC, the Congress, and the Muslim League. How did they balance these potentially conflicting allegiances?

Akash: AIWC was formed in 1927 by the merging of various women's groups to further the agenda of women. Initially, AIWC focussed on women's education, later on expanding its ambit to include social reform. They pushed for outlawing child marriages, raising the age of consent, and banning polygamy. AIWC believed that women's emancipation was not possible without reforming the various religious laws (personal codes). Over the next decades, women leaders worked towards building consensus for reforming the existing personal laws to ensure gender parity.

The individual politics of the women leaders were undoubtedly different but they were tied by the common thread of reforms for women. There were of course conflicts but mostly it was between senior women activists who didn't agree with the progressive thoughts espoused by the young women leaders. Renuka Ray faced criticism for advocating for the right to divorce and women's right to an inheritance. Similarly, Hansa Mehta's commitment to affecting substantive change also brought her into conflict. They tried to affect compromise where possible and bring the conversation back to social reforms.

The announcement of the Communal Award caused major fissures. AIWC decided to oppose women's reservation as they felt reservation was a divisive tool. The Muslim

members were not pleased with this position. A formal break in unity did happen when the Muslim League demanded a separate nation.

"Without a robust feminist movement, the Indian Constitution may have glossed over several fundamental issues."

Dakshayani Velayudhan's journey from Gandhian thought to the Ambedkarite movement (in her post-political career) is fascinating. Does her shift reflect the broader success of Ambedkar's approach to Dalit emancipation?

Angellica: Dakshayani faced caste oppression throughout her life. She belonged to the Pulaya caste, an untouchable or "slave" caste. Despite the abolition of slavery in the latter half of the 19th century, the Pulayas were forced into bonded labour and were not allowed to draw water from public wells or walk on the same roads as upper-caste people. Dakshayani's family members were involved in the resistance movement and were inspired by Sree Narayana Guru's social reform movement. Growing up in this backdrop, Dakshayani was vocal against casteism. As a follower of Gandhi, she believed in the power of his message of changing mindsets of the upper-caste people.

She was a strong woman who was unafraid of speaking her mind. She called untouchability "a sin against humanity". In the Constituent Assembly, she used her voice to highlight the plight of the Dalits. In the 1970s, she formed a Dalit women's organisation and worked to upskill them. To me, it is clear that though she had differences with Dr Ambedkar's approach, there was never any disrespect. Dakshayani referred to him as "one of the greatest sons of India". It was not uncommon in politics to be respectful and critical at the same time.

The Hindu Code Bill emerges as a crucial battleground in your book. Could you elaborate on its significance for women's rights and how some of the Fifteen shaped its passage?

Akash: For decades, women's groups had been agitating for progressive laws. The women leaders were conscious that any major gain in the status of women was not possible without a holistic reform of the religious laws. The biggest challenge to women's education was child marriages. Should the husband pass away, a widow was at the

mercy of the husband's family, having no formal right in the property. The enactment of the Sarda Act and the Age of Consent Bill were some of the earlier victories. In 1930s, the Deshmukh Act recognised a widow's right in the husband's property. Although effective, these were piecemeal reforms.

At least three of the 15 women were at the receiving end of regressive laws. Durgabai Deshmukh and Ammu Swaminathan were child brides and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit stared at a tumultuous future when her husband died. Vijaya and Ranjit [Pandit] did not have a male heir and the latter did not write a will. Her in-laws refused to give her a share.

The incessant advocacy by the women leaders was essential in creating support for the Hindu Code Bill. In 1945-46, AIWC adopted a charter of rights and duties and presented it to the Constituent Assembly. The Charter comprised several demands that struck at social inequities. When Prime Minister [Jawaharlal] Nehru decided to defer the enactment of the Bill, it left the women leaders disappointed. Renuka Ray and Durgabai Deshmukh complained to the Prime Minister who assured them his support. Eventually, in 1955, the Bill was broken down into separate bills and passed.

The fight for the Hindu Code Bill was concurrent with the demands for a Uniform Civil Code [UCC]. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta moved an amendment to make UCC a part of fundamental rights. Their proposal was shot down.

You mention consciously avoiding personal bias while analysing these women's stories. Why did you choose this approach, and what are your thoughts on critical historical analysis while acknowledging historical context?

Akash: We wanted to give the reader an accurate portrayal of their politics, ideologies, and what shaped their beliefs. It would be unfair to the protagonists and the readers if we let our biases come in the way. This choice was based on our experience during the research when we came across material that was often hagiographic and devoid of the context of the women's lives. These were remarkable women but not without flaws.

In a deeply patriarchal society, these women achieved remarkable success. What role did the men in their lives—fathers, husbands, mentors—play in their journey?

Angellica: The families played a crucial role in the lives of the women. Often, they had to juggle domestic lives and political activism. A supportive family and partners who were understanding helped the cause immensely. Husbands of Hansa Mehta, Leela Roy, Malati Choudhury, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, and Sucheta Kripalani were fellow travellers in the freedom struggle. Renuka Ray's husband was a bureaucrat who supported her activism even when it threatened his career. Begum Rasul, Hansa Mehta, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit benefitted from the mentorship of their fathers, who were stalwarts of the era.

How different might India's Constitution be if these 15 women had not been part of its creation?

Akash: One objective of our book was to show that there was more to constitution-making than what transpired in the Assembly debates in the three years from 1946 to 1949. By the time the framers set down to write the Constitution, the demand for equality to be expressly enshrined had taken root. Similarly, there was consensus on the need for a governing structure that addressed social and economic inequities. This was the result of years of advocacy by different groups. For nearly three decades before the assembly first convened, women leaders had been demanding equal civic rights. It was their advocacy that ensured the Uniform Civil Code was seriously deliberated upon and eventually formed part of the directive principles of state policy.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul's interventions were significant in building support for the abolition of religion-based reservations. Kaur and Hansa Mehta played a crucial role in ensuring the scope of the right to religion was subject to social welfare. G. Durgabai's amendment to reduce the age of Rajya Sabha membership from 35 years of age to 30 was accepted by the House. Renuka Ray and Purnima Banerji's opposition to the right to property as a fundamental right was not paid heed to in the Constituent Assembly. But in 1978, it was removed from fundamental rights and turned into a legal right.

Without a robust feminist movement, the Indian Constitution may have glossed over several fundamental issues. A good illustration of this is the US Constitution that proclaims “all men are created equal”. But since it did not expressly mention “women”, they were denied basic rights for over a century. While drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Hansa Mehta intervened and expressly demanded that they use gender-neutral terminology.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi paying his respects to the Constitution of India as he attends the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting at Samvidhan Sadan, in New Delhi, on June 7, 2024.

Brief Profiles of

FIFTEEN



15 Women of Constituent Assembly

<https://www.thelawadvice.com/articles/16-women-of-constituent-assembly>

The Constitution of India is one document which has not only united as many as 584 small principle states in 1947 but it is a document which is running the court of the greatest diversity in the world. When the Britishers were leaving the country, there was a need to unite the country and for this, a document was required to be prepared which could have not only brought uniformity in the country but also acceptable to the citizens of the country.

A Constituent Assembly was formed which comprised of 299 members. Out of the 299 members, there were 15 women members. What we don't know or have very little knowledge about is that the Constitution drafting committee had 15 women members who had worked for 2 years, 11 months, and 17 days before the Constitution was ready. Their contribution to our constitution is equally irreplaceable.

What was more appreciable about these 15 iron ladies of the country was their contribution before this, and after this also. They came from very different backgrounds and played vital role in equating the constitution with many oppressed and distressed classes of the society. This Article emphasises over their life, and contribution very precisely.

1. Ammu Swaminathan @ A. V. Ammakuti (22.04.1894-04.07.1978)

Ammu Swaminathan was an upper-caste Hindu family in Anakkara of Palghat district, Kerala. She was instrumental in forming the Women's India Association in 1917 in Madras, with other great women of the time such as Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Malathi Patwardhan, Dadabhoy and Ambujammal. She was a freedom fighter and she became a part of the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Constituency in 1946. She was elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha from Madras State in 1952. She was President of Bharat Scouts and Guides from 1960-1965. She was also selected as "Mother of the Year" in 1975 on the inauguration of International Women's Year.

She got married to Subbarama Swaminathan and she got education after her marriage when she was taught at Home.

Her life was transformed under the tutelage of her husband. Swaminathan nurtured his wife who was very young that time and encouraged her talents. He appointed tutors to teach her English and other subjects at home, and thus rectify to the extent possible the fact that she was uneducated. She became fluent in English very soon, and the confidence that her husband's support gave her, developed her to be a forceful and willful personality. It was under her husband's influence that Ammu became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and took part in India's struggle for independence.

2. Dakshayani Velayudhan (04.07.1912-20.07.1978)

Dakshayani Velayudhan was born on 4th July, 1912, on the island of Bolgatty of Cochin. She was leader of oppressed Classes. She was the first woman from Schedule Classes to graduate in India. She was a science graduate. She was one of the nine female members of the Constituent Assembly of India elected in 1946.

In 1945, Dakshayani was nominated to the Cochin Legislative Council by the State Government. She was the first and the only woman from a Dalit cast who got elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1946.

She was a staunch Gandhian and sided B R Ambedkar on many issues relating to the Scheduled Castes during the Constituent Assembly debates. She agreed with Ambedkar giving up the demand for separate electorates arguing instead for 'moral safeguards' and the immediate removal of their social disabilities.

When Dr Ambedkar introduced the draft Constitution for discussion, she expressed her appreciation for the draft while calling for greater decentralisation. She also suggested that the final draft of the Constitution should be adopted following a ratification through a general election.

3. Begum Aizaz Rasul (02.04.1909-01-08-2002)

Begum Aizaz Rasul was born in Malerkotla, into a princely family and was married to the young landowner Nawaab Aizaz Rasul. She was the only Muslim woman member of the Constituent Assembly.

With the enactment of the Government of India Act 1935, Begum and her husband joined the Muslim League and entered electoral politics. In the 1937 elections, she was elected to the UP Legislative Assembly.

After the partition of the country, few Muslim League members joined the Constituent Assembly of India. Begum Aizaz Rasul was elected the Deputy Leader of the Delegation and the Deputy leader of Opposition in the Constituent Legislative Assembly. When Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, the party leader left for Pakistan, Begum Aijaz succeeded him as the leader of the Muslim League and became a member of the Minority Rights Drafting Subcommittee.

She was instrumental in creating consensus amongst the Muslim leadership to voluntarily give up the demand for reserved seats for religious minorities. During the discussions pertaining to the right of minorities in an assembly of the Drafting Committee, she opposed the idea of having 'separate electorates' for Muslims.

She quoted the idea as 'a self-destructive weapon which separates the minorities from the majority for all time'. By 1949, the Muslim members who wished for the retention of separate electorates came around to accept Begum's appeal.

She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952 and was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly from 1969 to 1990.

4. Durgabai Deshmukh (15.07.1909-09.05.1981)

Durgabai Deshmukh was born in Rajahmundry on July 15, 1909. She was a freedom fighter and when she was 12 years old, she participated in the Non-Co-operation Movement and along with Andhra Kesari T Prakasam, she participated in the Salt Satyagraha movement in Madras city in May 1930.

In 1936, she established the Andhra Mahila Sabha, which within a decade became a great institution of education and social welfare in the city of Madras. She was also President of Blind Relief Association. She was the only woman in the panel of chairman in the constituent Assembly. She was instrumental in enactment of many social welfare laws.

She became member of Planning Commission by nomination and also became first woman to be Chairman of the board. She was the first one to

discuss the need of separate Family Court for speedy justice in familial matters.

She was elected to Constituent Assembly from Madras Province. In the assembly she proposed Hindustani as national language and also express her fear for forceful campaign for Hindi in Southern India.

5. Hansa Jivraj Mehta @ Hansa Mehta (03.07.1897-04.04.1995)

Born on July 3, 1897, to the Dewan of Baroda Manubhai Nandshankar Mehta, Hansa Mehta studied journalism and sociology in England. Along with being a reformer and social activist, she was also an educator and writer. She was also granddaughter of Nandshankar Mehta, the author of the first Gujarati novel Karan Ghelo.

She participated in various freedom movements in line with Mahatma Gandhi. She established Desh Sevika Dal in 1930. She was elected to Bombay Legislative Assembly. She wrote many books for children in Gujarati and also translated many English stories including the Gulliver's Travels. She was elected to the Bombay Schools Committee in 1926 and became President of the All-India Women's Conference in 1945-46.

Hansa represented India on the Nuclear Sub-Committee on the status of women in 1946. Hansa later went on to become the vice chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in 1950. She was also a member of the Executive Board of UNESCO.

6. Kamla Chaudhary (22.02.1908-1970)

Kamla Chaudhary was born in an affluent family of Lucknow; however, it was still a struggle for her to continue her education. Moving away from her family's loyalty to the imperial government, she joined the nationalists and was an active participant in the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Gandhi in 1930.

She was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) in 1946. She was a Member of the Provisional Parliament (1947 to 1952) and acted as the Senior Vice-Chair of the 54th Indian National Congress Session. She entered the Lok Sabha in 1962 after winning from Hapur District in Uttar Pradesh.

She was vice-president of the All-India Congress Committee in its 54th session and was elected as a member of the Lok Sabha in the late seventies. Chaudhary was also a celebrated fiction writer and her stories usually dealt with women's inner worlds or the emergence of India as a modern nation.

7. Leela Roy (02.10.1900-11.06.1970)

Leela Roy was born in Goalpara, Assam in October 1900. Her father was a deputy magistrate and sympathised with the Nationalist Movement. She graduated from Bethune College in 1921 and became an assistant secretary to the All Bengal Women's Suffrage Committee and arranged meetings to demand women's rights.

She was a radical leftist Indian woman politician and reformer, and a close associate of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. She worked for educating girls and established a girl's school in Dhaka.

In 1923, with her friends, she founded the Dipali Sangha and established schools which became centres of political discussion in which noted leaders participated. Later, in 1926, the Chhatri Sangha, an association of women students in Dacca and Kolkata, was founded. She became the editor of a journal, Jayashree.

In 1931, she began publishing Jayasree the first magazine edited, managed, and wholly contributed by women writers. It received the blessings of many eminent personalities including Rabindranath Tagore, who suggested its name.

8. Malati Choudhury (26.07.1904- 15.03.1998)

Malati Choudhury was born in 1904 to a distinguished family in the then East Bengal, now Bangladesh. In the year 1921, at the age of 16, Malati Choudhury was sent to Santiniketan where she got admitted to Viswa-Bharati.

During the Salt Satyagraha, Malati Choudhury, accompanied by her husband joined the Indian National Congress and participated in the movement. They educated and communicated with the people to create a favorable environment for Satyagraha.

9. Purnima Banerjee (1911-1951)

Purnima Banerjee was the secretary of the Indian National Congress committee in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. She was one of a radical network of women from Uttar Pradesh who stood at the forefront of the freedom movement in the late 1930s and '40s.

She was arrested for her participation in the Satyagraha and Quit India Movement. One of the more striking aspects of Purnima Banerjee's speeches in the Constituent Assembly was her steadfast commitment to a socialist ideology. As secretary for the city committee, she was responsible for engaging and organising trade unions, Kisan meetings and work towards greater rural engagement.

Purnima Banerji, was one of those women who became a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 1946. She was a part of the Constituent Assembly from 1946 to 1950, who played an important part in drafting our constitution.

She represented the United Provinces in the assembly. She wished to add a new paragraph in Clause 16:

'All religious education given in educational institutions receiving Statewide will be in the nature of the elementary philosophy of comparative religions calculated to broaden the pupils' mind rather than such as will foster sectarian exclusiveness.'

Purnima Banerji believed that ultimate sovereignty lies with people. She also wanted to drop the word "sovereign" from the Preamble. She believed that just by giving the public the right to vote in every 5 years, it's not appropriate to use the word sovereign. When we compare today's politicians treating the public as vote banks and later forgetting all their promises after getting elected, we can see the relevance of her concerns. At the same time, she truly believed that it is the common masses who vest power in the positions elected.

10. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur (2.02.1887 - 6.02.1964)

Amrit Kaur was born on February 2, 1889, in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. She was India's first Health Minister and she held that post for ten years. She did her educated at the Sherborne School for Girls in Dorset, England, but gave it all up to become Mahatma Gandhi's secretary for 16 years.

She was the founder of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and argued for its autonomy. She was a firm believer in women's education, their participation in sports and their healthcare.

Following India's independence from the colonial rule in August 1947, Kaur was elected from the United Provinces to the Indian Constituent Assembly, the government body that was assigned to design the Constitution of India. She was also a member of Sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights and Sub-Committee on Minorities. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, she supported a proposal for a Uniform Civil Code in India. She also advocated for universal franchise, opposed affirmative action for women, and debated the language concerning the protection of religious rights.

As the health minister, Kaur played an instrumental role in establishment of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi, and became its first president. Kaur introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha for the establishment of AIIMS in 1956,

Kaur was also instrumental in founding the Indian Council of Child Welfare. Kaur served as the Chairperson of the Indian Red Cross society for fourteen years.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur played a key role in the development of College of Nursing, New Delhi (established in 1946), Government of India renamed the college as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur College of Nursing in her honor.

From 1957 until her death in 1964, she remained a member of Rajya Sabha. Between 1958 and 1963 Kaur was the president of the All-India Motor Transport Congress in Delhi.

11. Renuka Ray (04.01.1904-1997)

Renuka Ray lived in London to complete her BA from the London School of Economics. She submitted a document titled Legal Disabilities of Women in India; A Plea for a Commission of Enquiry' in the year 1934, as legal secretary of the AIWC.

From 1943 to 1946 she was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly, then of the Constituent Assembly and the Provisional Parliament. In 1952-57, she served on the West Bengal Legislative Assembly as Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation. In 1957 and again in 1962, she was a member of Malda of the Lok Sabha.

She was also President of the AIWC in 1952, served on the Planning Commission and on the Governing Body of Visva Bharati University in Shanti Niketan. She served as a Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation. She established the All-Bengal Women' Union and the Women's Coordinating Council. Her memoir is titled My Reminiscences (1982).

On returning to India, she joined All India Women's Conference and worked hard to champion women's rights and inheritance rights in parental property. In 1932 she became President of All India Women's Conference. She was also its President for the years 1953-54.

In 1943 she was nominated to Central Legislative Assembly as a representative of women of India. She was also a member of Constituent Assembly of India in 1946-47.

She was appointed as Minister of Relief & Rehabilitation, West Bengal in the years 1952-57. She was also Lok Sabha member for the years 1957-1967 from Malda Lok Sabha constituency. In year 1959 she headed a committee on Social Welfare and Welfare of Backward Classes, which is popularly known as Renuka Ray Committee.

She is author of the book My Reminiscences: Social Development During the Gandhian Era and After.

12. Sarojini Naidu (13.02.1879 - 02.03.1949)

Sarojini Naidu, also known as the **Nightingale of India** in her poetic surroundings, was born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad, India. She was the first Indian woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress in 1925 and the first woman to be appointed as an Indian state governor. Naidu was appointed the governor of the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh), making her India's first woman governor. She remained in office until her death in March 1949 (aged 70).

Naidu's birthday, 13 February, is celebrated as Women's Day to recognise powerful voices of women in India's history.

Naidu was a founding member of the All India Women's Conference.

Naidu formed close ties with Gandhi, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. After 1917, she joined Gandhi's satyagraha movement of nonviolent resistance against British rule.

When Gandhi was arrested on 6 April 1930, he appointed Naidu as the new leader of the campaign Salt March.

13. Sucheta Kriplani (25.06.1908 - 1.12.1974)

Sucheta Kriplani was born in 1908 in present-day Haryana's Ambala town. She is especially remembered for her role in the Quit India Movement of 1942.

She came to the forefront during the Quit India Movement and was arrested by British. She later worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi during the Partition riots.

She was one of the few women who were elected to the Constituent Assembly of India. She was elected as the first woman CM of state of Uttar Pradesh from the Kanpur constituency and was part of the subcommittee that drafted the Indian Constitution. She became a part of the subcommittee that laid down the charter for the constitution of India. On 14 August 1947, she sang Vande Mataram in the Independence Session of the Constituent Assembly a few minutes before Nehru delivered his famous "Tryst with Destiny" speech. She was also the founder of the All India Mahilla Congress, established in 1940.

Kriplani also established the women's wing of the Congress party in 1940. Post-independence, Kriplani's political stint included serving as an MP from New Delhi and then also as the Minister of Labour, Community Development and Industry in Uttar Pradesh's state government.

When Congress split in 1969, she left the party with Morarji Desai faction to form NCO. She lost 1971 election as NCO candidate from Faizabad

14. Vijayalakshmi Pandit (18.08.1900 - 1.12.1990)

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was born in Allahabad on August 18, 1900, and she was the sister of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. She was imprisoned by the British on three different occasions, in 1932-1933, 1940, and 1942-1943.

Her political career began with her election to the Allahabad Municipal Board. In 1936, she was elected to the Assembly of the United Provinces, and in 1937 became minister of local self-government and public health the first Indian woman ever to become a cabinet minister.

She was the first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post in pre-independent India. In 1936, she stood in general elections and became member of parliament by 1937 for constituency of Cawnpore Bilhaur. In 1937,

Following the death of her husband in 1944, she experienced Indian inheritance laws for Hindu widows and campaigned with All India Women's Conference to bring changes to these laws.

In 1946, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces.

Following India's freedom from British occupation in 1947 she entered the diplomatic service and became India's ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1949, the United States and Mexico from 1949 to 1951, Ireland from 1955 to 1961 (during which time she was also the Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom), and Spain from 1956 to 1961. Between 1946 and 1968, she headed the Indian delegation to the United Nations. In 1953, she became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly

She served as Governor of Maharashtra from 1962 to 1964. She returned as a member of parliament for 1964 to 1968 with her election victory in Phulpur.

15. Annie Mascarene (6.061902 - 19.071963)

Annie Mascarene was born into a Latin Catholic family of Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. She was the first woman to be part of the Travancore State Congress Working Committee. She was one of the leaders of the movements for independence and integration with the Indian nation in the Travancore State.

In February 1938, when the political party Travancore State Congress was formed, she became one of the first women to join.

In 1942, Mascarene joined the Quit India Movement and two years later was elected as secretary of the Travancore State Congress.

In 1946, Mascarene became one of the 15 women who were elected to the 299-member Constituent Assembly of India, tasked with drafting the Constitution of India. She served on the Assembly's select committee that looked into the Hindu Code Bill. When the Indian Independence Act 1947 was passed by the British Parliament, the Constitutional Assembly became, on 15 August, the parliament of the Dominion of India. In 1948 she was reelected to the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly and served until 1952. In 1949, she became the first woman post-independence to serve as a Minister in the state, when she was appointed Minister in Charge of Health and Power in the Parur T K Narayana Pillai Ministry.

Mascarene was elected to the First Lok Sabha as an independent candidate from the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha constituency in the 1951 Indian general election. She was the first woman MP from Kerala and one of only 10 elected to Parliament in those elections.



Kindly visit these Web Links:

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[02] <https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2024/11/26/the-founding-mothers-of-the-indian-constitution-the-15-women-that-shaped-the-indian-republic/>
[03] <https://www.dakshindia.org/women-in-the-constituent-assembly/>
[04] <https://www.shankariasparliament.com/current-affairs/gs-i/women-in-the-making-of-indian-constitution>
[05] <https://www.shankariasparliament.com/current-affairs/gs-i/women-in-the-making-of-indian-constitution>
[06] <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpgclclefindmkaj/https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2024/nov/d>



PICTURES of *Constituent Assembly*

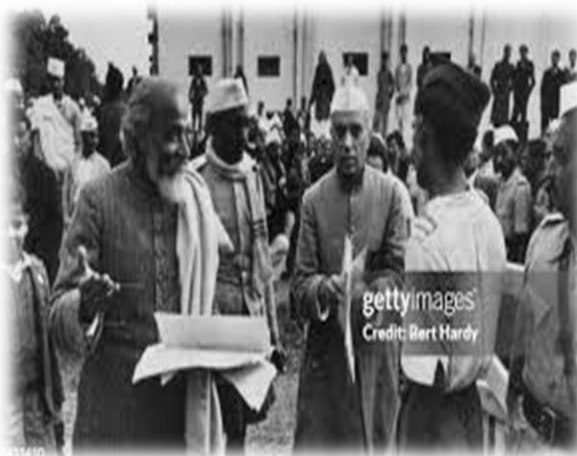






TIMELINE OF FORMATION OF "THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA"

| | |
|--|--|
| 6 DEC 1946 Formation of the Constituent Assembly (in accordance with French practice) | 9 DEC 1946 The first meeting was held in the constitution hall (now the Central Hall of Parliament House). 1st person to address - L.B. Shastri. |
| 13 DEC 1946 An "Objective Resolution" was presented by Jawaharlal Nehru, laying down the underlying principles of the constitution which later became the Preamble of the constitution | 11 DEC 1946 President Appointed - Bhanu Prasad, Vice-Chairman - Kameswari Chaudhary, Member for & Constitutional Legal Advisor - B.N. Rau |
| 22 JAN 1947 Objective resolution unanimously adopted | 22 JULY 1947 National Flag adopted |
| 29 AUG 1947 Drafting Committee appointed with Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as the Chairman | 15 AUG 1947 Achieved Independence, India split into Dominion of India & Dominion of Pakistan |
| 16 JULY 1948 Along with Kameswari Chaudhary, N.T. Krishnamachari was also elected as second vice-president of Constituent Assembly | 26 NOV 1949 Constitution of India passed and adopted by the assembly |
| 26 JAN 1950 Constitution of India came into force (at 11:57 AM, 26th Jan, 1950) | 24 JAN 1950 Last meeting of Constituent Assembly. Constitution of India adopted & enacted |



DEMAND FOR A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY - INDIAN POLITY NOTES



"CONSTITUTION IS NOT A MERE LAWYERS DOCUMENT, IT IS A VEHICLE OF LIFE, AND ITS SPIRIT IS ALWAYS THE SPIRIT OF AGE."

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR

15 Women

Who Wrote the Constitution

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpAiqNw2Ns_FnORkNBiS115AaawzA_lyr

Women of the Republic, a Newsworthy 2022 series profiling the incredible contribution of 15 women who were part of the Constituent Assembly and India's freedom struggle.



Sarojini Naidu

1879-1949

*Till ye have battled with great grief and fears,
And borne the conflict of dream-shattering years,
Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
Children, ye have not lived: for this is life.*



...
The lyrical lilt in her poems earned Sarojini Naidu the everlasting sobriquet—Nightingale of India.

A multifaceted woman, she was also a feminist, suffragist, freedom fighter and stateswoman.

Born in Hyderabad, she was homeschooled in Madras before obtaining a scholarship to study in London and Cambridge. She became the first Indian woman president of the Indian National Congress in 1925.

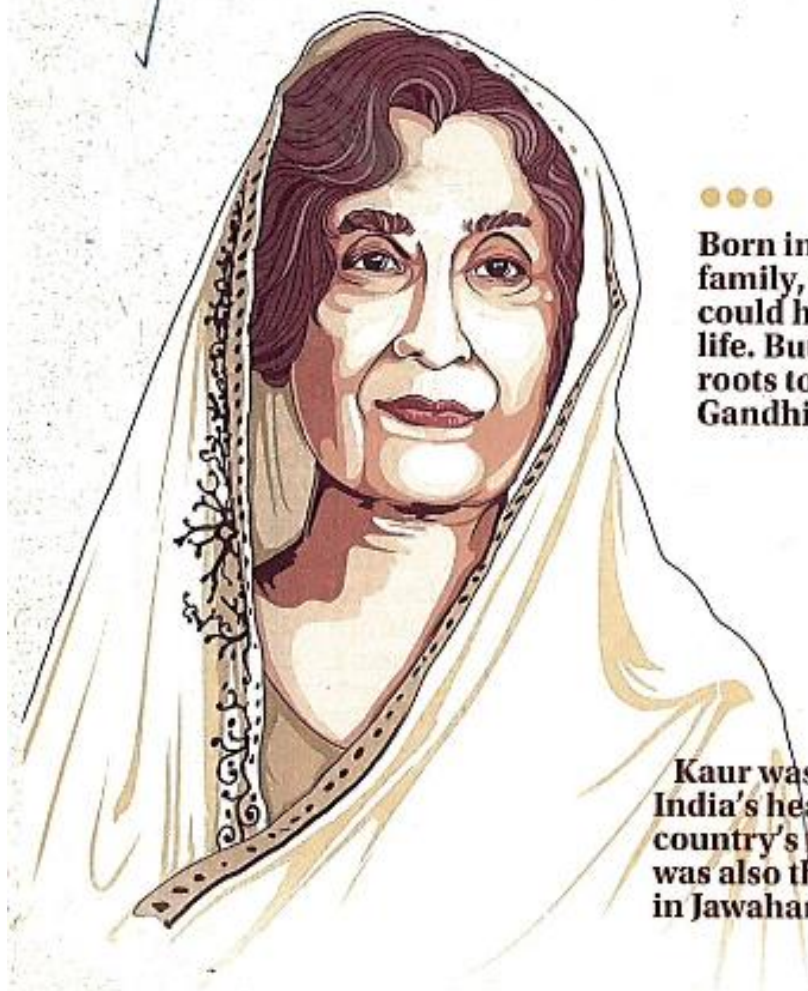
"We attain our own flag, the flag of free India.... Men and women, old and young, princes and peasants, Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Zoroastrians, all of them have fought under this flag," she told the Constituent Assembly as the new flag was being adopted.

Post Independence, she served as the governor of Uttar Pradesh for two years till her death.

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— REPUBLIC DAY SPECIAL —

CONSTITUTION @ 75



● ● ●
Born into the Kapurthala royal family, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur could have lived a sheltered life. But she shed her royal roots to work with Mahatma Gandhi and lived an ascetic life.

Kaur was the youngest child and the only daughter of Raja Sir Harnam Singh, who had converted to Christianity. The Oxford graduate was a staunch advocate for women's rights, opposing child marriage and the *purdah* and *devadasi* systems. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly's fundamental rights sub-committee and the minorities sub-committee, and voted in favour of the Uniform Civil Code.

Kaur was instrumental in drafting India's health care policies as the country's first health minister; she was also the only woman minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's first cabinet.

She introduced the AIIMS bill, paving the way for the establishment of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi. Health and education remained her key focus areas, and she was the deputy leader of the Indian delegation to the UNESCO in 1945 and 1946. She was also the first female and first Asian president of the World Health Assembly.

Rajkumari
Amrit Kaur

~~~~~  
1889-1964



— REPUBLIC DAY SPECIAL —

CONSTITUTION @ 75

# Hansa Jivraj Mehta

1897–1995

● ● ●  
**Hansa Jivraj Mehta** was introduced to the Indian freedom movement far away from home, in London, by Sarojini Naidu in

1920. She had moved to England to study journalism and sociology. She was a member of the fundamental rights sub-committee, the advisory committee and the provincial constitutional committee of the Constituent Assembly. On August 15, 1947, on behalf of the women of India, she presented the national flag to the assembly.

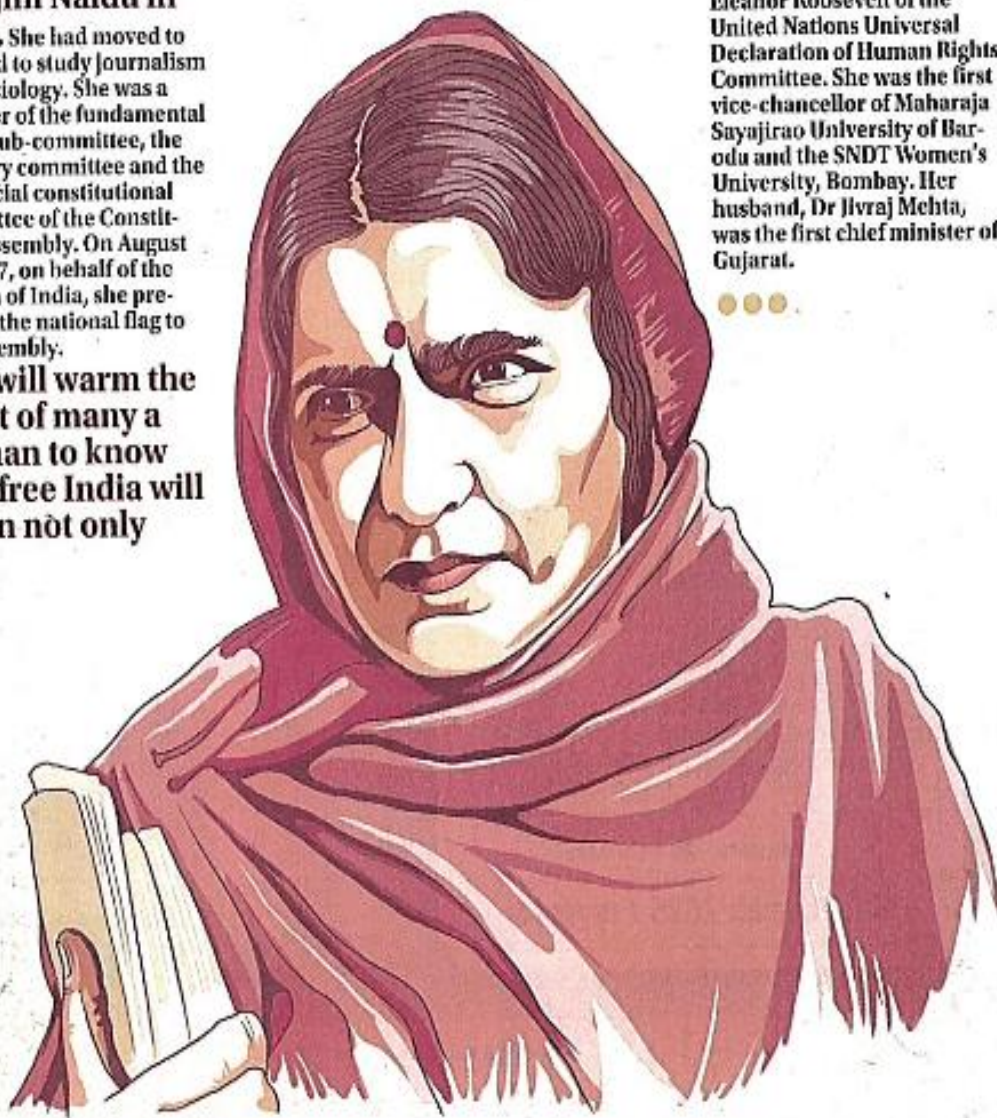
“It will warm the heart of many a woman to know that free India will mean not only

equality of status, but equality of opportunity,” she said,

supporting the ‘objectives resolution’ moved by Jawaharlal Nehru.

She also supported the Uniform Civil Code, saying, “We have too many personal laws in this country and these personal laws are dividing the nation today. It is therefore very essential if we want to build up one nation to have one civil code.”

She was vice-chair with Eleanor Roosevelt of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Committee. She was the first vice-chancellor of Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda and the SNDT Women’s University, Bombay. Her husband, Dr Jivraj Mehta, was the first chief minister of Gujarat.







## Dakshayani Velayudhan

1912-1978

● ● ●  
**The only dalit woman to be elected to the Constituent Assembly, she was also one of the youngest members of the assembly at 34.**

Dakshayani Velayudhan with husband Raman reportedly became the first dalit couple to be members of the provincial parliament.

Born into the Pulaya community, Velayudhan's life and politics were influenced by the rigid caste system in Kerala. The Kayal Sannelanam (meeting on the backwaters) of 1913 in Kochi shaped her politics. During the meeting, members of the Pulaya community, including her family, gathered on small boats as they were barred from assembling on land. Velayudhan reportedly requested that her biography be called "The Sea has no Caste."

"When this Constitution is put into practice, what we want is not to punish the people for acting against the law, but what is needed is that there should be proper propaganda done by both the central and provincial governments. Then only there will be improvement that we want," she said in the assembly.

In 1977, she set up Mahila Jagriti Parishad, a women's rights organisation, in Delhi.

● ● ●



# Durgabai Deshmukh

1909–1981



...  
**Durgabai Deshmukh caught the freedom bug quite young—at 12, she quit school to protest the imposition of English. She walked out of her child marriage, refusing to go with her husband and opting for studies instead. She studied law and practised at the Madras court.**

**She played a crucial role in framing India's welfare policies, and is referred to as the 'mother of social welfare in India'.** As a member of the Constituent Assembly, she advocated for a national language, judicial independence and women's participation in governance. She founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha, which provided education and health care to countless women. She was a member of the Planning Commission and also headed the National Committee on Girls' and Women's Education. She was married to C.D. Deshmukh, the first Indian governor of the Reserve Bank of India.



# Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

1900–1990

There was no sibling rivalry here, only mutual admiration between Jawaharlal Nehru and sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

And rightly so! Pandit was no less a political figure than her brother. In 1937, she became the first Indian woman cabinet minister in pre-Independence India. As member of the Constituent Assembly, she championed the principles of democracy, secularism and human rights. "An independent India would no doubt assume leadership not only of Asia but of the world, and so when we meet here in this assembly to draw up the future Constitution of our country, we must not forget that it is not only to ourselves we owe a duty but also to the world which looks to us," Pandit said in the assembly.

In 1953, she became the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly. Later, she served as an ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mexico, and the high commissioner to the UK. She was also governor of Maharashtra and on Nehru's death in 1964, she contested and won from Phulpur. She did not let her filial bond stop her from criticising niece Indira Gandhi's Emergency years.





● ● ●  
She had her basics sorted—Sucheta Kripalani started out as a teacher of constitutional history at the Banaras Hindu University.

**She married Acharya Kripalani, who later became Congress president, and soon found herself deeply involved in the freedom struggle.** She set

up the women's wing of the Congress in 1940. She closely worked with Mahatma Gandhi during the partition riots to restore peace and help the victims.

In the Constituent Assembly, Kripalani was part of the flag presentation committee. A few minutes before Nehru's 'tryst with destiny' speech, she sang Vande Mataram in the independence session of the Constituent Assembly.

**She became India's first woman chief minister, heading the government in Uttar Pradesh from 1963-1967.**

# Sucheta Kripalani

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1908-1974





# Ammu Swaminathan

1894-1978



Ammu Swaminathan found good company when she joined politics and the women's rights movement. Along with the likes of Annie Besant and Kamala Chattopadhyay, she set up the Women's India Association.

**She was vocal about reforms in laws regarding succession, inheritance and marriage. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, she spoke on fundamental rights and directive principles.**

"People outside have been saying that India did not give equal rights to her women. Now we can say that when the Indian people themselves framed their Constitution they have given rights to women equal with every other citizen of the country. That in itself is a great achievement," she said in the assembly.

**She was elected to the first Lok Sabha in 1952 and later to the Rajya Sabha.** She was also the vice president of the censor board. Her daughter Lakshmi Sahgal led the all-woman Rani Jhansi regiment of Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.



# Purnima Banerjee

1911-1951



Younger sister of freedom fighter Aruna Asaf Ali, Purnima Banerjee served as Congress secretary in Allahabad. She worked with rural communities to raise awareness about the freedom struggle and fundamental rights.

In the Constituent Assembly, she intervened in discussions around the Preamble, preventive detention and qualifications of Rajya Sabha members. As member of the sub-committee on fundamental rights, she advocated for religious freedom, women's rights and socioeconomic justice.

She led the chorus in singing 'Jana Gana Mana' after its adoption as national anthem.





# Begum Aizaz Rasul

1909–2001



● ● ●  
**The only Muslim woman member of the Constituent Assembly, Begum Aizaz Rasul came from a princely family but had more of a political upbringing, thanks to her father. She was a strong advocate of secularism and communal harmony. She formally gave up the purdah in 1937 when she won her first election from a non-reserved seat (in what is now Uttar Pradesh) in British India. She spoke on national language, reservation, minority rights during her stint in the Constituent Assembly. In the aftermath**

**of the partition, she was among the few Muslim leaders who spoke against reservation for minorities. It is said that post independence her views on the same had changed. She was also against feudal practices like the zamindari system. Her stance had often invited ire from the community.**

**Rasul was later elected to the Rajya Sabha and the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly. She was also a sports enthusiast, known for her role in promoting women's hockey.**

● ● ●





Annie  
Mascarene

Annie Mascarene collected degrees like nobody's business—she had a double master's in economics and history, and after her return from Sri Lanka where she taught as a lecturer, she got a law degree as well. **Federalism was an issue close to her heart and she spoke on the need for a strong Centre in her speech in the Constituent Assembly. "We are at the advent of democracy," she said. "Democracy has got a tendency to let loose fickle emotions and disruptive forces. In the circumstances, without a strong Centre, I do not think we can have a successful democracy."**

**Mascarene was the first woman MP to be elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala. As member of Parliament, she talked about the under-representation of women in politics.**

1902–1963



Renuka  
Ray  
1904–1997

Renuka Ray came from a family of achievers—she was a descendant of Brahmo reformer Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee; her maternal grandfather was the first Indian to get a diploma in philosophy from Oxford; her grandmother was the first Indian woman on the Calcutta University senate, her father was an Indian Civil Service officer and mother was part of the All India Women's Conference.

**Inspired by Gandhi, she initially left college but later on his and her parents' persuasion studied at the London School of Economics. She championed the cause of women's and minorities' rights and also inheritance rights in parental property.**

**During her intervention in the Constituent Assembly, she spoke against reservation for women, terming it "an impediment to our growth and an insult to our very intelligence and capacity". She served as Lok Sabha MP from Malda for two terms.**



# Malati Choudhury

1904-1998



✓  
...  
Though she was born in a family of politicians, it was during her time at Visva Bharti in Santiniketan that she developed an interest in the freedom movement.

**Deeply influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi, she dedicated her life to uplift the marginalised in Odisha. She was married to Nabakrushna Choudhury, who served as the state's chief minister. She popularised the Praja Mandal movement in the state.**

She quit the Constituent Assembly the year she joined, to work with Gandhi. Marxist in her outlook, she organised several movements for workers and tribals. She was also jailed during the Emergency. Her cousin, Indrajeet Gupta, later became the Union home minister. She was THE WEEK's 'Woman of the Year' in 1990.

...



# Kamla Chaudhry

1908-1970

A Hindi short story writer, she let her writing do the talking, combining her literary talent with her commitment to social reform. Kamla Chaudhry completed her Hindi literature course despite objections from her affluent family in Lucknow.

**Her writing focused on the oppression of women, and her work as a Gandhian was centred around empowering women through education and self-reliance.**

She actively worked towards educating girls in villages and backward areas. She also encouraged the khadi and village industries, which she felt had the potential to provide employment to young women. In the Constituent Assembly, she advocated for rural development and women's rights. **She was elected to Parliament from Hapur in Uttar Pradesh, in 1962.**





# Leela Roy

1900-1970



Academically brilliant and doggedly determined, Leela Roy fought her way to get into the all-male University of Dhaka, becoming the first woman to earn a master's degree from there. She worked tirelessly to uplift women, and played a key role in getting women to join the freedom struggle. She set up multiple women and educational organisations like Deepali Sangha and Mahila Atma Raksha Fund, where women were taught martial arts and self-defence. She was a close associate of Subhas Chandra Bose. She was the only elected woman member from Bengal to the Constituent Assembly. However, she resigned from her post in protest against the partition of India and dedicated herself to the relief and rehabilitation of refugees.

After her resignation from the Congress, she joined the Forward Bloc, a political party founded by Bose. She set up relief camps for families affected by the riots in Noakhali, now in Bangladesh.



Ammu Swaminathan  
(22.04.1894 - 04.07.1978)

# Ammu Swaminathan

The strongest advocate against caste discrimination, she lived by example.



Ammu as a young woman (standing)

It's an incident from 1943 at the Vellore jail. Ammu Swaminathan had been arrested and jailed after she participated in the Quit India movement in 1942. "One of the inmates saw a woman sanitary worker and called out to her as 'Shudrachi', making her 'low caste her identity'. Annoyed, Ammu walked up to her and said, 'Yes, tell me'. The confused woman said she was calling the sanitary worker, to which Ammu, who was born into a Nair family, but considered them as shudras as well, replied: 'I am a shudrachi too. Now say what do you want'." Subhashini Ali, member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the granddaughter of Ammu, remembers her feisty grandmother with great pride. "She was very conscious of the arrogance of the upper-caste and constantly tried to unsettle them by standing against it," Ali adds.

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# Ancestral Home of Anakkara Vadakkathur

**Palakkad, Kerala**

[https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-  
detail.htm?2722](https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?2722)



**Captain Lakshmi Sehgal with Netaji Bose**



**Captain Lakshmi Sehgal**



**Ammu Swaminathan**



**AV Kuttimalu Amma**

The Indian struggle for independence, although the result of the cruel colonization of the British, is perhaps the most glorious movement for breaking shackles in world history. Patriots from every nook and cranny of our nation came together for a cause that unified them, ultimately leading to the liberation of our motherland. Decades later when we look back, we happen to notice some selfless people who fought for independence but history was so unkind that we barely remember their names.

There are many monuments and places of historical importance that even today stand, paying homage to the freedom struggle and its leaders. An instance is an ancestral home of the Anakkara Vadakkathu family at Trithala in Kerala. Along with prominent figures like Perumbilavil Govinda Menon, the Anakkara Tharavadu is home



to some of the bravest women India has ever seen, the first among them being Anakkara Vadakkathu Kuttimalu Amma.

V. Kuttimalu Amma is an unavoidable name when we speak of the civil disobedience movement in the south. Due to her sheer determination and leadership quality, she became President of the Hindi Prachar Sabha and an elected member of the Madras Legislative Assembly and Calicut Municipal Council. At the young age of 27, she was imprisoned along with her 2-month-old baby for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement. By the time the Quit India movement began in 1942, she was already a prominent leader in the Malabar region. Her consistent involvement in the revolts got her imprisoned once again at the presidency jail in Amaravathi, this time for 2 years. Thankfully, she lived to see the liberation of India and in her final years, she kept herself busy in social work. This is why even today, people of Palakkad remember her with tears in their eyes and gratitude in their hearts.

Surely, A. V. Kuttimalu Amma was capable of everything that she did because she had a great example set before her, in the form of her sister, Ammu Swaminathan. A member of the Constituent Assembly led by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, a strong activist of the independence movement and most importantly, a strong and independent woman who never hesitated to speak out loud. Despite the fact that she was a young, uneducated girl who got married to a much older Dr. Swaminathan, she fearlessly pledged that she will not be confined to the kitchen. With support from her husband, a young Ammu started learning about politics and English, mastering both in no time. She also proved to the little girls that even if you are denied education, your willpower and thirst for knowledge can take you to great heights.

When one has such a bold and inspiring lady for a mother, they are bound to be one, too. Likewise, Lakshmi Swaminathan who always looked up to her mother grew up to be one of the most feared enemies of the British. Unlike the rest of her family who was supporters of the INC and were strong Gandhians, Lakshmi took part in the non-Gandhian struggle for Independence. After her graduation from the Madras Medical College, she practiced medicine in the Government Kasturba Gandhi hospital in Chennai. Due to certain issues in her personal life, she left for Singapore, with no clue that there she would meet two people who would change her life forever - Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who would later become her mentor and have a huge influence on her, and Colonel Prem Kumar Sahgal, who would marry her and become an integral part of her life.

During her time in Singapore, she almost instantly befriended Prem Sahgal when he introduced to her the Azad Hind Fauj. Whilst taking care of her patients who were prisoners of war, she also got to meet popular national leaders such as S.C. Guha, K.P. Kesava Menon, and N. Raghavan. This fuelled her interest to take part in kicking the colonial forces out of the country. Very soon, on 2 July 1943, things took a huge turn for Lakshmi when Netaji himself arrived in Singapore intending to raise an army by taking up the leadership of the prestigious Indian National Army established by Rash Behari Bose. Netaji wished to involve women in the fight and in Dr. Lakshmi, he

found a courageous leader capable of fighting for the cause against all odds. A recommendation from Colonel Sahgal, who was already a trusted officer at the INA, was the only push he needed to appoint her as the head of the women's regiment called "Jhansi Rani" regiment, especially since it was Lakshmi's own idea. It was then that she became quite popular under the name Captain Lakshmi, owing to her rank in the army.

The INA now teamed up with the Japanese army and marched to Burma, now Myanmar, in December 1944. They were able to hoist a flag at Imphal but finally, they lost out to British forces by the month of May in 1945. The brave soldiers were jailed for another year, by the end of which they were sent back to India from Burma for the trials. This was the time when the extremist leaders were gaining popular support and hence the members of the Azad Hind Fauj including Captain Lakshmi were praised for their heroism. It is firmly believed by historians that this incident had a large influence on the British leaving India the following year.

Young girls from all parts of the nation were influenced by the bravery of Captain Lakshmi. That long list includes her own cousin, G. Susheela. One of the most iconic female leaders during the Quit India movement, Anakkara Vadalakkathu, G. Susheela sometimes lovingly called Susheelamma is popular for her catchphrase "Charkha for women empowerment". Even though she was a strong feminist like her cousin, she was inclined towards the INC more than Marxism. Hailing from a family full of Gandhians, she was a staunch supporter of Gandhian ideas like nonviolence, swadeshi, khadi, and so on, from a young age itself. This love for the congress and admiration for Mahatma further strengthened when she was fortunate enough to meet him while he was addressing the Hindi Prachar Sabha.

During the time she stayed with her aunt Ammu Swaminathan in Chennai she participated in several revolts during the Quit India movement. One such protest march at the Madras secretariat even got her jailed. That did not stop her. Her enthusiastic involvement in Malabar made her the secretary of the women's wing of INC. After their independence, she continued to contribute to society by serving its people. She always wore khadi and propagated her ideologies to the youngsters.

Each of these brave women, all belonging to one family tree, have sacrificed so much for Bharat Mata and are now role models for us and generations to come.





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<https://x.com/EduMinOfIndia/status/1868700281870885314?lang=en>

Ms. Ammu Swaminathan was a trailblazer in the Constituent Assembly of 1946. She actively participated in every debate and meeting, contributing significantly to the drafting of the Indian Constitution. She championed the cause of women's rights, ensuring equal legal protections and opportunities for women in independent India. Her vision and dedication continue to inspire generations to work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

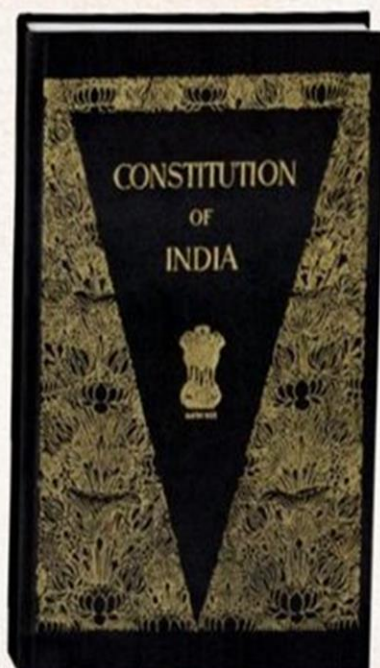






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Ministry of Education, Govt. of India

# Know Your Constitution



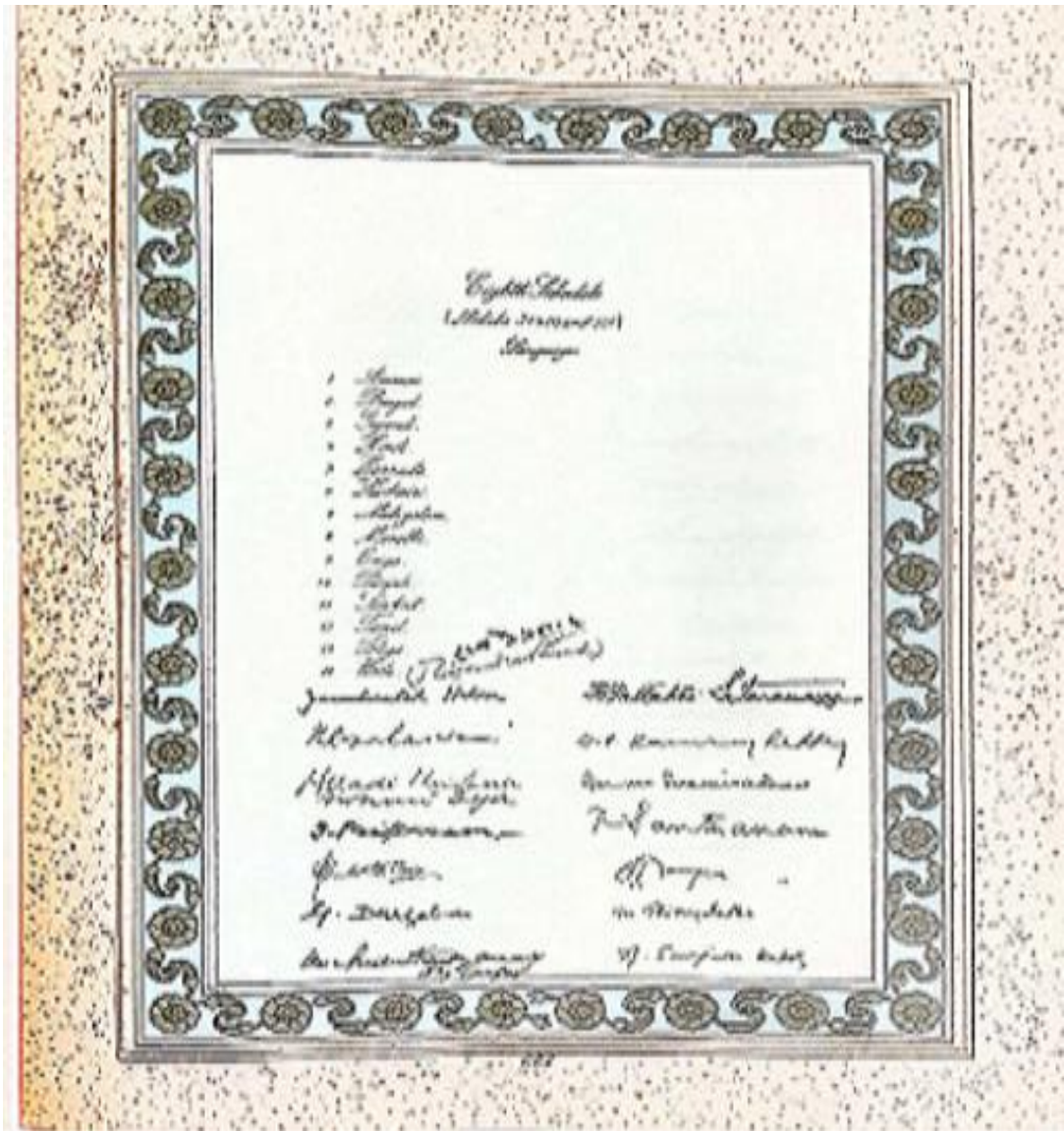
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Ms. Ammu Swaminathan was a prominent member of the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Constituency in 1946. She hailed from the Palghat district in Kerala. As one of the fifteen women members of the Constituent Assembly, she played a significant role in shaping the Constitution of India.

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### Women who were part of the making of the Constitution of India

The Constituent Assembly of India was elected to frame the Constitution of India. It was elected by the 'Provincial Assembly'. Following India's independence from British Government in 1947, its members served as the nation's first Parliament. Of the 389 members of the Indian Constituent Assembly, 15 were women.

### **Ammu Swaminathan**

Ammukutty, as she was fondly called was fearless in thought and action, evident in her lifetime as social worker and politician. Through her work at WIA, she addressed the economic issues and problems of women workers. It was one of the first associations to demand adult franchise and constitutional rights for women. Lakshmi Sahgal, Ammu's second-born, would lead the Rani Jhansi regiment in the Indian National Army under Subhash Chandra Bose.

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# Ammu Swaminathan

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/ammu-swaminathan/>



## Early Life

Ammu Swaminathan was born in 1894 in Palakkad, Kerala. She learnt English and moved to Madras soon after her marriage to S. Swaminathan. From 1914 onwards, she was drawn to the political and women's rights movement.

In 1917, she worked with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Annie Besant, Muthulakshmi Reddy, and others to set the Women's India Association (WIA) at Adyar, Madras. WIA transformed into one of the largest women's rights organizations in India, and it worked to tackle social issues such as child marriage and the devadasi practice. It made representations before the Montague Chelmsford Commission, 1917 and Southborough Commission in 1918 and advocated for equality of voting rights for women.

## Role in India's Independence Movement

Swaminathan joined the Indian National Congress in 1934. She was also involved in the Quit India Movement in 1942 that led to her imprisonment a year later. She was a strong advocate for women's rights



and called for reform of laws and bills related to succession, inheritance and marriage.

### Contribution to Constitution Making

She was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Constituency in 1946. She spoke on fundamental rights and directive principles.

### Later Contributions

Post-independence she was elected to the first Lok Sabha in 1952 and subsequently to the Rajya Sabha 1954. Apart from her time at the Parliament, her interests in movies led her to become the Vice President of the Federation of Film Societies and the Censor Board. For five years, she also served as the President of the Bharat Scouts and Guides between 1960 and 1965.

Swaminathan passed away in 1978.

**Key Speech:** On 24 November 1949, two days before the adoption of the Constitution, in her general comments on the Constitution, Ammu stated that fundamental rights and directive principles constituted the core of the Constitution. However, she was not pleased with the 'bulkiness' of the constitution and would have rather preferred one that could be carried in a pocket.

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### Kindly visit the Web LINK

Ammu Swaminathan

Women in Constituent Assembly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9S8bj4kUc>

Ammu Swaminathan was born on 22 April 1894 in Palghat, Kerala. Ammu or as everyone fondly called her - Ammukuti's father Nair Govinda Menon was a local official. After his death in childhood, his mother raised him and his siblings. Obviously, Ammu's personality was influenced by her mother. Ammu's strong personality is also reflected in her upbringing. She was the mother of Captain Lakshmi Sehgal and Mrinalini Sarabhai. Two incredible women who contributed in India's development.

## **A Fiery Feminist from Her Early Years**

<https://wdcdrblog.wixsite.com/mysite/post/ammu-swaminathan-a-fiery-feminist-from-her-early-years>

Ammu Swaminathan was born in Palakkad district of present-day Kerala in 1894. Her ideas reflected a feministic outlook from a very young age and this continued to manifest in her activities as a social reformer and politician. Her career both before and after Independence shows qualities of resilience and fortitude as she bravely stood up against the injustice around her and actively worked to bring about structural change as well.

What I will talk about here is an incident from 1943 that happened in the Vellore jail. Ammu Swaminathan had been arrested and jailed after she participated in the Quit India movement in 1942. "One of the inmates saw a woman sanitary worker and called out to her as 'Shudrachi', making her 'low caste her identity'. Annoyed, Ammu walked up to her and said, 'Yes, tell me'. The confused woman said she was calling the sanitary worker, to which Ammu, who was born into a Nair family, but considered them as shudras as well, replied: "I am a shudrachi too. Now say what do you want." Subhashini Ali, the granddaughter of Ammu, remembers her feisty grandmother with great pride, adding, "She was very conscious of the arrogance of the upper-caste and constantly tried to unsettle them by standing against it".

Ammukutty, as she was fondly called, was fearless in thought and action, evident in her lifetime as social worker and politician. One of the most recollected stories about Ammu's strong, assertive nature is when she agreed to get married at the age of 13 to Subbarama Swaminathan, a man twenty years her senior. Closely associated with her father P Govinda Menon, Swaminathan came back after his studies in England and asked to marry any of Menon's daughters. He was informed by Ammu's mother that Menon had died and all their daughters, except Ammu, "the youngest daughter who was like a tomboy", had been married off. Swaminathan is said to have proposed marriage to the teenager who replied unhesitatingly that "she did not mind" but had her own conditions. These included a shift to Madras, learning English from an English woman so that she could master the language perfectly and not be asked what time she'd reach home, because "nobody asked her brothers that question", Subhashini recollects.

Swaminathan agreed to the conditions and the two married in 1907. The Nair Sambandam system—where children did not inherit their father's property and men were exempted from responsibilities towards their wives and children —was well accepted in the matrilineal Nair families in those days. Swaminathan and Ammu's family found the practice repugnant and were against it. They had a proper wedding, which was, however, "boycotted" by Swaminathan's family because he was marrying outside caste. He, therefore, married Ammu again and registered their marriage in England.

It was around 1914, that Ammu became politically active. According to the Oxford Encyclopaedia of Women in World History, she formed the Women's India Association in 1917 in Madras, along with Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Malathi Patwardhan, Mrs

Dadabhoy and Mrs Ambujammal. The WIA addressed the economic issues and problems of women workers. It was one of the first associations to demand adult franchise and constitutional rights for women. She became part of the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Constituency in 1946. While Ammu would go on to vehemently oppose discriminatory caste practices in her personal and political life, her support for “equal status, adult franchise and removal of untouchability” was complete. Having been at the receiving end of the practice of child marriage herself, she fought hard for the Sarda Act or Child Marriage Restraint Act, Age of Consent Act and the various Hindu Code Bills that pushed for a reform in Hindu religious laws.

In 1946, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Madras and was one of the very few women involved in the drafting of the Indian Constitution. She spoke on fundamental rights and directive principles. Although she was happy with the final draft that the Assembly passed, she criticised it for going into too many details and becoming a very lengthy volume.

In a speech during the discussion on the motion by Dr B R Ambedkar to pass the draft Constitution on 24 November 1949, an optimistic and confident Ammu said, “People outside have been saying that India did not give equal rights to her women. Now we can say that when the Indian people themselves framed their Constitution; they have given rights to women equal with every other citizen of the country.”

#### **About the Author:**

Ishta is currently pursuing her Bachelors in Commerce (Honors) with Minors in English Literature from Daulat Ram College, University of Delhi. She comes from the hills of Shimla, which is where she took to reading really early on moulding her into the ardent reader that she is today. According to her it would be quite unfair on her part to call herself a feminist, if she couldn't contribute to a feminist community right in her college i.e. the Women's Development Cell.

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**Inspirational Woman**

**Ammu Swaminathan**

<https://aishwaryasandeep.in/iw4-2/>

**Ammukutty Swaminathan** (22 April 1894 – 4 July 1978) was an Indian social worker and political activist during the Indian independence movement and a member of the Constituent Assembly of India.

She was the youngest of their thirteen children. Ammu never went to school and received only a rudimentary education at home, which consisted of minimal reading and writing in Malayalam, cooking and keeping house, to prepare her for married life. She lost her father at a very young age, and her mother struggled to raise her children and arrange marriages for her many daughters. Dr. Swaminathan visited the family after he had established himself as a lawyer in Madras and offered to marry the young Ammu who



agreed to marry him only if she was assured of complete freedom, a good education and life in a city. They did not enter into a sambandham as was the usual practice between a Brahmin male and Nair female but had a traditional Nair wedding which was boycotted by the Brahmins.

It was around 1914 that Ammu became politically active. In 1917 she formed the **Women's India Association** along with Malathi Patwardhan, Annie Besant, Mrs. Dadabhoy, the Margaret cousins, and Mrs Ambujammal. They tried to address the social and economic issues of women labourers.

Ammu joined the **Indian National Congress** in 1934. She was a strong advocate for universal adult franchise and equal constitutional rights for women and this reflected in her activities as part of the *Indian National Congress* as well. She was an active participant in the *Quit India Movement* in 1942 and as an aftermath was jailed for a year in Vellore.

She was also a strong advocate of pro-women legislation and pushed for the *Sarda Act* or the *Child Marriage Restraint Act*, *Age of Consent Act* and the various Hindu Code Bills aiming to reform succession, inheritance and marriage laws. Later as a member of the Lok Sabha she also pushed for maternity benefits for women.

In 1943, while being in Vellore jail, she **heard** one of the inmates calling out a sanitary worker by the name "*Shudrachi*" (meaning a lower caste person) and walked up to her saying "*Yes, tell me*". The confused woman explained to Ammu that she was referring to the worker to which she is supposed to have spiritedly replied "*I am a Shudrachi too. Now say what you want*". This is just one of the many instances where Ammu had explicitly shown her disagreement with the Caste System that was an integral part of the society then.

In 1946, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Madras and was one of the very few women involved in the drafting of **the Indian Constitution**. Although she was happy with the final draft that the Assembly passed, she criticised it for going into too many details and becoming a very lengthy volume.

In 1959, while Satyajit Ray was the President of the *Federation of Film Societies*, she became its Vice President. Later she also headed the CBFC and the Bharat Scouts and Guides.

Ammu also criticised Nehru for responding to the title of "*Panditji*", which according to her was a mark of caste superiority. While Nehru had supposedly provided a justification that he never asked anyone to address him as such, Ammu still found it problematic that he responded to the title.

She also faced difficulties in her marital life as she belonged to a caste considered lower in hierarchy to her husband's, who was a Brahmin. She came to know of her daughters being made to consume food outside the house on the veranda in Swaminathan's ancestral home because they were not 'complete' Brahmins. Both she and her husband Dr. Swaminathan were opposed to this and campaigned against such regressive caste practices.

Ammu had **FOUR** children, who were distinguished in their respective fields.

**Govind Swaminadhan**, the elder son, a barrister at the Madras High Court. His wife was the daughter of Pundit Santhanam, founder of Lakshmi Insurance Company of Lahore.

**Subbaram**, the younger son, an executive with Mahindra. His wife Nuru Swaminathan, was the sister of M. C. Chagla, the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court.

**Captain Lakshmi Swaminadhan** (1914-2012). Dr. Lakshmi Sahgal led the Rani of Jhansi Regiment of the Indian National Army. She was also a Member of the Rajya Sabha. She led a medical team to Bhopal after the gas tragedy in December 1984, worked towards restoring peace in Kanpur following the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and was arrested for her participation in a campaign against the Miss World competition in Bangalore in 1996. She was still seeing patients regularly at her clinic in Kanpur in 2006, at the age of 92.

**Mrinalini Sarabhai**, a [Bharatanatyam](#) dancer and wife of [Vikram Sarabhai](#), a renowned scientist. They are the parents of [Mallika Sarabhai](#), a dancer and former [Gujarati](#) film actress.

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Kindly visit these Web Links

[01] AAZADI SPECIAL | President speech Women Freedom fighters | **Ammu Swaminathan** | VIPIN KUMAR GUPTA |

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUsEOkDQfQE> [14:47]

[02] Mothers of Indian Constitution: **Ammu Swaminathan** and other 14

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX\\_gs69g9zM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX_gs69g9zM) [2:30]

[03] Women Who Shaped Our Constitution | Echoes Of 15 Indian Women in The Parliament

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa\\_QTHOOZ9s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa_QTHOOZ9s) [5:48]

In the revered chambers of the Constituent Assembly, 15 diverse yet united women defied divisions. Renuka Ray and Purnima Banerjee championed women's rights. Hansa Mehta envisioned gender equality, while **Ammu Swaminathan** celebrated women's recognition. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur challenged religious freedoms, and Dakshayani Velayudhan shattered stereotypes, transcending conventions. From Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy to Droupadi Murmu, the legacy of Indian women took shape. Hansa Mehta handed India its first flag of independence at the stroke of midnight when India attained freedom.



Annie Mascarene  
(06.06.1902 - 19.07.1963)



Statue at Vazhuthacaud

Annie Mascarene

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie\\_Mascarene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annie_Mascarene)

Annie Mascarene



Annie Mascarene

Member, Constituent Assembly of India

Personal details

Born

6 June 1902  
Travancore



|                          |                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Died</b>              | 19 July 1963 (aged 61)                                                                                            |
| <b>Nationality</b>       | Indian                                                                                                            |
| <b>Political party</b>   | <a href="#">Indian National Congress</a>                                                                          |
| <b><u>Alma mater</u></b> | <a href="#">University College, Thiruvananthapuram</a> <a href="#">Government Law College, Thiruvananthapuram</a> |

**Annie Mascarene** (6 June 1902 – 19 July 1963) was an Indian independence activist, politician and lawyer from [Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala](#). She was a member of the [Constituent Assembly of India](#) as representative of State of [Travancore-Cochin](#). In 1952, she became the first woman from Kerala to be elected as a [Member of Parliament](#).

### Family and education

Mascarene was born in [Thiruvananthapuram](#) in June 1902 into a [Latin Catholic](#) family. Her father, Gabriel Mascarene, was a government official of the [Travancore](#) state. She attended the [Maharaja's College, Thiruvananthapuram](#) earning double [M.A.](#) in history and economics in 1925. She went on to earn a [degree in law](#) at the [Law College, Thiruvananthapuram](#), following her return from a teaching stint in [Ceylon](#).

### Freedom fighter and early politics

Along with [Akkamma Cherian](#) and [Pattom Thanu Pillai](#), Mascarene was one of the leaders of the movements for independence and integration of the [princely states](#) within the Indian nation. In February 1938, when the political party [Travancore State Congress](#) was formed, she became one of the first women to join. The party's goal was to establish a responsible government for Travancore and it was led by Pattom Thanu Pillai as president under whom served K. T. Thomas and [P. S. Nataraja Pillai](#), as secretaries, and M. R. Madhava Warriar, as treasurer. Mascarene was appointed to the working committee and also served on the party's publicity committee. One of the first acts of the working committee was to send a memorandum to the Maharaja, [Sree Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma](#) to demand the termination of the appointment of Sir [C. P. Ramaswami Iyer](#) and establish an enquiry into his [administration](#), appointments, and financial affairs in his role as [Dewan](#). Iyer and his supporters retaliated for the attack on his administration.

In a statewide propaganda tour undertaken with party president Pillai, Mascarene was outspoken in her criticism of the level of participation allowed in the legislature, of the dewan, and the government. Her statements led to assault by a police officer as well as her home being broken into and her property being stolen. She published an account of the incident, angering the police. Iyer spoke to the Maharaja against her, alleging that Mascarene was making speeches defaming the government

and encouraging non-payment of taxes. The police commissioner also reported that she was dangerous and fomenting discontent. Her activism led to numerous arrests and imprisonments for various periods from 1939-1947.

In 1938 and 1939, Mascarene served on the Economic Development Board of the Travancore government. During her time in the state legislature, she became a powerful speaker and enjoyed policymaking. In 1942, Mascarene joined the [Quit India Movement](#) and two years later was elected as secretary of the Travancore State Congress. On 21 February 1946 [Mahatma Gandhi](#) wrote to Mascarene regarding a speech she had delivered in Bombay, "Even otherwise, I know that you have no control over your tongue and when you stand up to speak, you blab anything that comes to your mind. This speech also is quite a specimen, if the newspaper report is correct. I have sent the report to Bhai Thanu Pillai. You can read it. Such indiscreet talk can do good neither to you nor to the poor people of Travancore. Besides, by your act you put the whole fair sex to shame". Gandhi also wrote to a colleague in the state congress, Pillai hoping to relieve Mascarene of her ministerial role in the government.

### **Parliamentary career**

In 1946, Mascarene became one of the 15 women who were elected to the 299-member [Constituent Assembly of India](#), tasked with drafting the [Constitution of India](#). She served on the Assembly's select committee that looked into the [Hindu Code Bill](#). When the [Indian Independence Act 1947](#) was passed by the British Parliament, the Constitutional Assembly became, on 15 August, the parliament of the [Dominion of India](#). In 1948 she was reelected to the [Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly](#) and served until 1952. In 1949, she became the first woman post-independence to serve as a Minister in the state, when she was appointed Minister in Charge of Health and Power in the [Parur T K Narayana Pillai](#) Ministry.

Mascarene was elected to the [First Lok Sabha](#) as an independent candidate from the [Thiruvananthapuram](#) Lok Sabha constituency in the [1951 Indian general election](#). She was the first woman [MP](#) from Kerala and one of only 10 women elected to the Parliament in those elections. In the second [General Elections of 1957](#), she was defeated in Thiruvananthapuram by [S Easwaran Iyer](#), coming fourth in a contest that also featured her erstwhile colleague in the Travancore Congress, [Pattom Thanu Pillai](#).

### **Death**

Annie Mascarene died in 1963 and her grave lies at the Pattoor cemetery in Thiruvananthapuram.

**Commemoration**

In September 2013, a bronze statue of Annie Mascarene was unveiled by [Hamid Ansari](#), the then [Vice President of India](#), at the Annie Mascarene Square, [Vazhuthacaud](#), Thiruvananthapuram.



Annie Mascarene

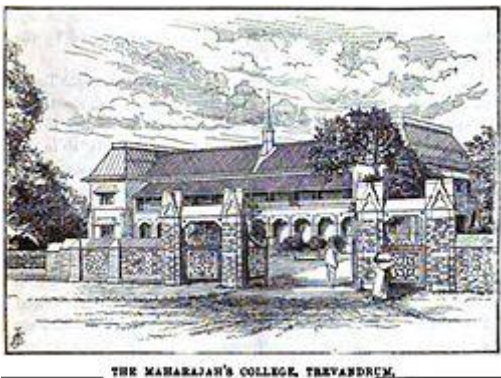
*TrailBlazer from Travancore*

<https://feminisminindia.com/2018/03/07/annie-mascarene-constituent-assembly/>

There were 299 members in the Constituent Assembly led by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar in 1946. This assembly included lawyers, freedom fighters and politicians. Regular rhetorics of history have made us uncontestedly believe that men, not women, were the primary agents in forming the Indian Constitution. However, as much as history has denied knowing them, there were 15 women in the Constituent Assembly making their mark and asserting female agency. One of those women was Annie Mascarene.

**Early Life**

On the 6th of June in 1902, Annie Mascarene was born into a Latin Catholic family in the Travancore State of India. She grew up to pursue a double masters in History and Economics in Travancore. After her studies, she moved to Sri Lanka to serve as a lecturer.





She scheduled her return to India and after a brief stint in law, she again dabbled in teaching at her alma mater – *Maharajah's Colleges for Arts and Law, Trivandrum*. However, her academic feats aside, Annie Mascarene is mostly known for her substantial contribution to Indian politics during the Independence era.

### **Spearheading the political domain**

She spearheaded the demand for women's representation in the 40's and broke the sexist barrier on many political fronts. She served as an MLA for the *Travancore Legislative Assembly*. She was the first woman to become an MP from Kerala in the first *Lok Sabha* besides joining the Constituent Assembly under B.R. Ambedkar.

As part of her **independence activism**, she led the fight to integrate and cement Travancore's place in the newly independent nation of India. The princely state was formerly recognized as a ruled area and not a part of India – Mascarene's primary agenda. Witnessing a crucial turning point in her home state's history and many other princely states, she along with other leaders like Vijay Singh Pathik and Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, catalyzed the fight of their inclusion into India as a nation.

The British and rulers of these states made attempts to curb these movements and immobilize their leaders, including Annie Mascarene. There were incessant attacks on the property and life of Mascarene and her allies. However, the politically active figure proved her mettle and not after long, Travancore was inducted as a part of India and its legislation.

### **Composing the Constitution**

Upon joining the Constituent Assembly, she opened her greetings to the speakers of the house, she **said**, *"On behalf of those few ladies here, I hope that you will give us sufficient protection and opportunities for expressing our opinion in this House"*.

In the assembly, Mascarene's agendas focused on the struggle of the people in Travancore. Even though she believed that centralization of power was essential for a successful democracy, she did realize that too much of centralization could lead to democratic tenets being altered.

She put forth a nuanced argument in the assembly for partial provincial autonomy and said that the centre cannot assume to be the complete *"custodian of justice"*. Mascarene supported the proposition of provinces having wriggle room and space to evolve as legislations through trial and error. She reiterated the fact that India was still discovering itself as a democracy and setting rules in stone would be detrimental. With regards to this, she put forth the following **statement**:

*"We are here laying down principles - rudimentary principles - of democracy, not for the coming election but for days to come, for generations, for the nation. Therefore, principles of ethics are more*

*suitable to be considered now than principles of expediency. I am a believer in politics as nothing but ethics writ large”.*

### **The march against meddling men**

Throughout her career, Annie Mascarene received her fair share of sexism, mostly due to being in such a traditionally masculine work environment. Her being a woman made it difficult to thrive in politics.

One of her first **tiffs** was with the *dewan* of Travancore – C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. He came from a conflicting ideology as he believed that Travancore should not be a part of India. This, many say, was in his own personal interest. The *dewan* stood as one of the biggest hurdles in Mascarene’s struggles to integrate her home state into India as he saw her as a threat to his ambitions.

There was also another **instance** where she accused the Minister of Public Works – John E Philipose for corruption while working in Chief Minister Parur T.K Narayana’s ministry. Parur T.K. stood by Philipose’s side but events eventually led to him filing his resignation. Philipose, apart from denying the charges, also filed a defamation case against Annie Mascarene which he consequently won. As a result, Mascarene had to pay compensation for the damages.

### **Sexist consequences of being candid**



**Annie Mascarene Square in Thiruvananthapuram.**

Mascarene, through her political ventures, had established herself as a brave force to be reckoned with. She secured her position as one of India’s primary Independence activists using her strong oratory skills.

While her speeches added new strength to her character, they were also unfairly categorized to be extremely provocative because they were coming from the “fairer sex”. Citing a speech given in Bombay, Gandhi in a letter to her in 1946, **wrote**:

*“Even otherwise, I know that you have no control over your tongue and when you stand up to speak, you blab anything that comes to your mind. This speech also is quite a specimen, if the newspaper report is correct. I have sent the report to Bhai Thanu Pillai. You can read it. Such indiscreet talk can do good neither to you nor to the poor people of Travancore. Besides, by your act, you put the whole fair sex to shame”.*

Through her career, Mascarene had many run-ins with the law due to being an outspoken woman in pre-Independence India. She served 18 months in prison 1938 for sedition, 2 years in 1942 for inflammatory speech and 6 months in 1946 for allegedly spreading rumours that incited violence.

In a gendered domain like politics, it was hard to even see women, let alone appraise their opinions. Annie Mascarene, by using her speeches (provocative or not) as powerful tools, made sure her points were registered well. She was not only instrumental in uplifting her community throughout her career but also women. Justice is not done to her work in current popular records of history and thus it is high time we brought Annie Mascarene out of the shadow of her male counterparts.

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## Unsung Heroes Detail

*Paying tribute to India’s freedom fighters*

<https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?3270>

**Annie Mascarene**

Trivandrum, Kerala





Annie Mascarene was a great freedom fighter of Travancore. Anne Mascarene was born in 1902 as the daughter of Gabriel Mascarene, who was the personal assistant of the Diwan of Travancore. After her Master's, she left for Sri Lanka and worked there as a lecturer at Sangamitra College. Later she completed her graduation in law and started practice in Trivandrum. She was very eager to join the national movement to fight for freedom.

When Travancore State Congress started the agitation for Responsible Government, she joined Congress to participate in the agitation. Annie Mascarene had actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and she was arrested at Chengannur. She became the Working Committee Member of the Travancore State Congress but was arrested for treason on account of her active participation in Congress activities. She was imprisoned for one and a half years and fined Rs. 1000/- also. Annie Mascarene continued her fight till the end of British rule. Later she became a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1948. In the same year, she was also elected as a member of the Travancore Legislative Assembly. She died in July 1963.



# Annie Mascarene

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/annie-mascarene/>

## Early Life

Annie Mascarene was born on 6th June 1902 at Trivandrum. She obtained a double M.A. in history and economics from Colleges for Arts and Law, Trivandrum and went on to become a lecturer in Sri Lanka. After her return to Trivandrum, she procured a law degree.

She was a member of the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly between 1948 and 1952 where she served briefly as a Minister in charge of Health and Power.

## Contribution to Constitution Making

Mascarene represented the Princely State of Travancore and Cochin Union in the Constituent Assembly. In the Assembly, she spoke on the issue of federalism.

## Later Contributions

Mascarene was elected to the first Lok Sabha as an independent candidate. She was the first woman from Kerala to have been elected to the Lok Sabha where she raised concerns about under-representation of women in politics. Her political career took a hit after her unsuccessful attempt in the 1957 Lok Sabha elections.

## Speech:

1. On 18 November 1949, a few days before the adoption of the Constitution, Mascarene supported the federal framework of the Constitution with a strong centre.

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Kindly visit these Web Links:

[01] Saga of Freedom Struggle Remembering Nationalist Annie Mascarene

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VenKIU07zgo> [3:30]

[02] Annie Mascarene | First Woman MP from Kerala | Women in Constituent Assembly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iNyOr0iAhg> [3:45]

[03] Women in Constituent Assembly | Annie Mascarene

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWA\\_dL1vIu0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWA_dL1vIu0) [3:14]

[04] DDNEWS IMPHAL | AZADI - KA - SAFAR (ANNIE MASCARENE)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsDYyT5HOE4> [2:47]

[05] Annie Mascarene | Penperuma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqhKaB8ntVg> [10:50]

[06] The Journey of Freedom Movement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VtmamjJjOg> [6:07]

[07] Azadi ka Safar 06 June

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1GaLSKwQ2Y> [5:56]

In today's episode, we remember nationalist Annie Mascarene, who was born on 6th June 1902 at Trivandrum. Along with Akkamma Cherian and Pattom Thanu Pillai, Mascarene was one of the leaders of the movements for independence and integration of the Princely States with the Indian Union. In February 1938, when the political party Travancore State Congress was formed to establish a responsible government for Travancore, Mascarene became one of the first women to join and was appointed to the working committee. In 1938 and 1939, Mascarene served on the Economic Development Board of the Travancore government. In 1942, Mascarene joined the Quit India Movement and two years later was elected as secretary of the Travancore State Congress. Her activism led to numerous arrests and imprisonments for various periods during 1939-1947. Mascarene represented the Princely State of Travancore and Cochin Union in the Constituent Assembly. In the Assembly she spoke on the issue of federalism. She was a member of the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly between 1948 and 1952 where she served briefly as a Minister in charge of Health and Power. Mascarene was elected to the first Lok Sabha as an independent candidate. She was the first woman from Kerala to have been elected to the Lok Sabha. Annie Mascarene, who died on 19th July, 1963, worked for the betterment of people till the very end.

We also remember nationalist Hanumanthappa Narasimhaiah, who was born on 6th June, 1920 in Hosur, Karnataka. The young Narasimhaiah joined the National High School in Bengaluru in 1935. The school became a platform for his interaction with Mahatma Gandhi the very next year, when the latter visited it and young



Narasimhaiah was the translator for his speech. He became a lifelong Gandhian, and was jailed during the Quit India movement for nine months. After independence, Narasimhaiah joined National College, Bengaluru as a faculty member. He went on to do his PhD in nuclear physics at Ohio State University, but remained a strong votary of non-violence and peace. After coming back to India, Narasimhaiah became the Principal of the National College, Basavanagudi in 1961. Later, he became the Vice-Chancellor of Bangalore University in 1972. Narasimhaiah believed education and rational thinking were the means to uplift the masses. He started five schools and colleges in remote villages of Kolar district. Narasimhaiah was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the government of India in 1985. He died in 2005 and was cremated at Hosur with state honors. We also remember revolutionary freedom fighter Ashok Nandi, who died on 6th June, 1909. Born in 1888, Nandi was a member of the revolutionary group in Comilla, now in Bangladesh. He took an active part in the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905. Nandi was arrested in 1908 for complicity in the Alipore Bomb Case and died while imprisoned in the Presidency Jail on 6 June 1909.

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## Begum Aizaz Rasul

(02.04.1909 - 01.08.2001)

### BIOGRAPHY

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/begum-aizaz-rasul/>

#### Early Life

Born into a princely family on 4 April 1908 in Punjab, politics and public life was not new to Begum Aizaz Rasul. She was involved in politics at a very young age- she attended political conferences with her father and also served as his secretary.

Rasul defied many traditional norms like the purdah system.

#### Role in India's Independence Movement

Rasul stepped into electoral politics in 1937 when she was elected as a member of the U.P. Legislative Assembly. She continued to be a member of the U.P. Assembly until 1951. Rasul was among the very few women legislators to be elected from a non-reserved province in British India- a remarkable achievement.

During her tenure as a member of the U.P. Assembly, she served in important posts like the Leader of the Opposition (1950-1952) and Deputy President of the Council (1937-1940).

She was a strong opponent of reservation for minorities in legislative assemblies, the partition of India, and feudal practices like the Zamindari system.

#### Contribution to Constitution Making

Rasul was the only Muslim woman in the Constituent Assembly. She represented the United Provinces as a Muslim League member. In the Assembly, she intervened in the debates on national language, India remaining a part of the Commonwealth, reservation, property rights, and minority rights.

#### Later Contributions

Rasul had an active political career post-independence as well. Rasul was elected to the Rajya Sabha (1952-1956). She was subsequently elected to the legislative assembly of Uttar Pradesh (1969 -1989).

Her views on reservations seemed to have changed. When invited to a convention to discuss the need for a reservation for Muslims in legislatures and services, Rasul [sent](#) a message – “*As communal feelings have grown and the concept of Hindutva has gained popularity, it is time now to think anew of how to improve the educational and socio-economic conditions of Muslims.*”

Rasul was deeply [involved](#) in popularising Hockey for Indian women. For two decades, she [served](#) as the President of the Indian Women’s Hockey Federation. Later, she went on to head the Asian Women’s Hockey Federation.

She passed away in December 2001.

### **Key Writings**

Rasul penned her autobiography titled [From Purdah to Parliament](#). She chronicles her journey as a Muslim woman in the Indian political and constitutional space.

### **Key Speeches:**

1. During the discussion on the Report of Advisory Committee on Minority Rights, Rasul [spoke](#) against separate electorates for minority communities. But at an earlier occasion, she had also [clarified](#) that the majority must fulfill its duty not to discriminate against minorities for joint electorates to work.
2. Responding to the demands of making 'Sanskritised Hindi' the National language, she pointed out that very few people understood the language. Instead, she [argued](#) for adopting Hindustani as the national language.
3. During the discussion on fundamental rights, she [noted](#) that the restrictions in the Draft Constitution, 1948 essentially negated the fundamental rights guaranteed. She stated, “*I find that what has been given with one hand has been taken away by the other.*”
4. Rasul [highlighted](#) the need for ensuring 'just compensation' in another one of her interventions around the government's power to acquire property.
5. She also made an important [speech](#) in the Assembly in favour of Nehru's proposal for India to remain a part of the Commonwealth while also attaining the status of a Republic.







Taylor & Francis  
Online

## The Life and Times of Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul: An Exploration of Muslim Women's Self-Fashioning in Post-Colonial India

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00856401.2021.1878418#abstract>

### Abstract

This paper examines the life and times of a remarkable twentieth-century figure, Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul (1908-2001), the first and only Muslim woman in independent India's Constituent Assembly which drafted the country's Constitution. In doing so, it critically engages with the genre of autobiographical writing—the limits it imposed and the particular vantage points it offered. By drawing upon Begum Rasul's private papers, her autobiography and her speeches in the Constituent Assembly debates from 1946 to 1950, this paper unpacks the ways in which she sought to negotiate her multiple and intersecting identities of class, gender and religious background. Her acts of self-fashioning provide critical insights into how Muslim women negotiated their identities in post-colonial India often in resistance to, and conformity with, the national status quo.

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Women in Constituent Assembly

The Forgotten Grit of Begum Aizaz Rasul

<https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/women-in-constituent-assembly/>

*If you look at the history of Constituent Assembly Debates with a magnifier, you will find fifteen women loudly and silently registering themselves at the moment and the making of the Indian Constitution. Their voice and their names in the Constituent Assembly Debates, mark their journey from suffering to suffrage.*

***Lawctopus and Academike bring to you a Women's Day Special series.***

*We are revisiting passages and excerpts from the Constituent Assembly Debates voiced by seven of the fifteen women who were part of the Constituent Assembly Debates (CAD).*

*These speeches were collated and researched by Divya Dwivedi, Advocate Supreme Court of India. Edited and written by Sonali Chugh and Umang Poddar.*



**The many women who asserted themselves through their presence in Constituent Assembly debates.**

The process of writing the constitution was also the moment to define how the people of new India were going to place themselves within it.

When looking high and low for the women among the Constituent Assembly Debates, you will have to look really closely to find them. The debates and the assembly, both saturated with upper-caste men, in the moment of their making were trying to expand their bounds of inclusivity while also shrinking it.

Till today, not much has changed. Seventy-one years after the promulgation of the constitution, we have only 78 women out of 543 members in the Lok Sabha. This is also the highest that India has had since independence.

**It took seventy-three years since December 9, 1948, from the first time when the constituent assembly met to now, for this number to change from eighteen to seventy-eight.**

Begum Aziaz Rasul was the only Muslim 'elite' women out of 389 members of the constituent assembly. Begum Rasul was a member of the Muslim

League until 1950, she was also the only women among the 28 Muslim League members who were part of the Constituent Assembly.

Apart from being a member of the Constituent Assembly, she was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council (1937-52), a Member of the Rajya Sabha until 1956, and Deputy Chairperson of the Council (1937-39). She served as the Cabinet Minister of the Uttar Pradesh Government from 1969 till 1974. She went on to win a Padma Bhushan for her social work in the year 2000, just a year before her death.



### Begum Rasul's Autobiography

Begum Rasul was known for being against religious orthodoxy and derogatory norms. She had shunned the '**purdah**' and also those who forced women to hide behind it.

In her book ***From Purdah to Parliament: A Muslim Woman in Indian Politics***, she vocalised this staunchly.

Though she is forgotten for her dissent on separate electorates for minorities in the early 1900s, she revisits us once in a while as one of the fifteen women of the Constituent Assembly, all of whom deserved more attention from historians.

Autonomy to Ministers from Party Affiliations<sup>[1]</sup>

Begum Rasul saw beyond her time and demanded a ministry and an executive that was not apprehended by parties. In the constituent assembly debates held in July 1947 on a Thursday, she had offered an amendment to have a 'single non-transferable vote' to appoint an executive who will be impartial without malice or pressure from their parties.

***"Sir, my purpose in moving this amendment is that the Ministry should be a strong and stable Ministry and that it should not be subject to the whims and fancies of the party or legislature to which it is responsible. Sir, in England and France the Ministry is responsible to the legislature."***



*We see what happens in France every day. The Ministry is weak and the Cabinet has fallen several times. That always happens where there are more than two parties in the legislature, and therefore in India which is so young in democracy, where the sense of responsibility is neither ingrained nor so well developed, we should have a strong and stable Ministry which can initiate long-range policies and be uninfluenced daily by the repercussions in its party. We do not want a repetition of what is happening in France in our country.*

*Sir, my experience of the last ten years after the introduction of the Government of India Act of 1935 has been that in the provinces where the Ministers are responsible to the legislature and are liable to fall on a vote of no-confidence by their party or the provincial legislature, they cannot put forward any long-range policies. As I said before, often they are influenced daily by party feelings and are therefore necessarily weak. I, therefore, feel that a Ministry that has been elected by the legislature should have a long life in which it can formulate its policies and not be influenced by party factions.*

*We may have the American system under which the President nominates his executive, but our country may not be ready for that. But the Swiss system under which the Legislature elects the executive for a certain period during which it is irremovable is to my mind the best form of government for the provinces because the Ministers who have once been elected by the legislature cannot be removed by a vote of no confidence in it by the legislature.*

*I feel therefore that the Swiss system is the best via media that can be accepted by us in this country, keeping in view the political and other conditions that are prevailing here and will continue for a long time to come."*

On Fundamental Rights, Minority Rights<sup>[2]</sup>

When Begum Aziaz Rasul silently passed away in August 2001, Obaid Nasir had issued an [obituary after her death](#), laying out achievements that were already common parlance.

But what stood out in that arguably short obituary was her devotion for those who had already become second class citizens before the constitution came into being. Throughout her political struggle, she stood for women, children and minorities. She stood against social norms, often prescribing them as archaic.

Nasir, towards the end of the obituary, briefly mentioned her role as a Chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh Minorities Commission and her resignation from the position on moral grounds in 1989. This fact also reverberates with her role and cause back in the Constituent Assembly Debates. Begum Rasul had proposed to give strength to Fundamental Rights, such that they were not dictated by the legislature.

She argued against reservation because she argued for the absoluteness of the Fundamental Rights. In the debate dated November 8, 1948, Rasul had demanded complete agency to be given to Fundamental Rights and Directive principles. She had said,

***"Fundamental Rights should be such that they should not be liable to reservations and to changes by Acts of legislature. It is essential that some at least of the civil liberties of the citizen should be preserved by the Constitution and it should not be easy for the legislature to take them away. Instead of this, we find the provision relating to these Rights full of provisos and exceptions. This means that what has been given today could easily be changed tomorrow by an Act of the legislature."***

***"It is necessary that some sort of agency should be provided to see that the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles are being observed in all Provinces in the letter and in the spirit. Otherwise, it may be that the absence of such an agency may give rise to the formation of communal organisations with the object of watching the interests of their respective communities."***

In a series of cogent arguments, Begum Rasul explained why she was against the reservation of seats in the house. She advocated for innate goodwill within the majority, she advocated for the duty of the majority to not discriminate against the minorities. One could call her hopeful or delusional for not being able to foresee what was to come.

Ironically enough, Begam Rasul was more confident about this 'goodwill' than the majority present in the house itself.

***"The question of the reservation of seats for the minorities has engaged the attention of this House. It is true that last year on the recommendations of the Minorities Sub-Committee, this House accepted the principle of the reservation of seats for certain communities. At that time also I was opposed to this reservation of seats, and today again I repeat that in the new set-up with joint electorates it is absolutely meaningless to have the reservation of seats for any minority. We have to depend upon the good-will of the majority community. Therefore speaking for the Muslims I say that to ask for reservation of seats seems to my mind quite pointless, but I do agree with Dr. Ambedkar that it is for the majority to realise its duty not to discriminate against any minority."***

***"If that principle that the majority should not discriminate against any minority is accepted, I can assure you that we will not ask for any reservation of seats as far as the Muslims are concerned. We feel that our interests are absolutely identical with those of the majority, and expect that the majority would deal justly and fairly with all minorities."***

Against Making the Acquisition of Property by State Non-Justiciable<sup>[3]</sup>

On September 12, 1949, Begum Rasul was finally allowed to speak in the house, after much delay and with little time left to speak, she addressed this delay with a [benign jibe](#).

She took to the podium to oppose clause (4)<sup>[4]</sup> and clause (6)<sup>[5]</sup> of Article 24 concerning the acquisition of property and compensation. Article 24 was proposed by former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru yet she had no qualms in addressing her contentions with it.

Begum Rasul rose and relentlessly spoke about the wrongs and addressed the bottled up uncertainties among the populace.

***"With due respect to the Honourable Prime Minister, I am constrained to say that the amendment proposed by him does not lay down principles based on fairness and justice. There are two principles laid down in this article: One is acquisition of property, Clause (1), and the second is the manner and mode of the payment of compensation, Clause (2). Now, Sir, under the following Article 25 (1) it is clearly laid down that every person will have the right to approach the Supreme Court. This of course is not only in regard to acquisition of property but for every purpose. But ordinarily also any person has a right to file a suit attacking an Act authorising the acquisition of property if the compensation is not proper in his opinion.***

***Therefore, Sir, my contention is that when a right has been given to every person living in this Union to approach the Supreme Court, to have recourse to justice, why should this right be taken away under Clauses (4) and (6) from only those people who are being deprived of their property in the three provinces of the U.P., Bihar and Madras, who are being subjected to legislation which will deprive most of them of their only source of livelihood. I contend that in the Constitution of a country such exceptions cannot be made and therefore I feel that if Clauses (4) and (6) of this article are allowed to remain, it will be a great blot upon this Constitution. The Constitution of a country is not made merely for a few years, or to suit this programme or exigencies of a political party – it is made for generations and for all peoples and to keep a provision such as is provided in Clauses (4) and (6) will not do credit to the Constitution makers and will remain an ugly blot. Therefore, I earnestly hope that wiser counsels will prevail and that such an absurd provision will not be included."***

When Begam Rasul spoke against the clauses she claimed to have spoken for the thousands who could be affected.

When she spoke in the constitution hall, she excused herself for the 'feeble' voice that was resonant enough to claim itself in the Constituent Assembly Debates Archive. They were resonant enough to live and be repeated even after more than seventy-one years. One may not agree with Begum Rasul on several of her contentions, but by the fact of being present in archives and debates, she is still vocal and unforgettable.



**Endnotes**

[1] <sup>5</sup> Consideration of Clause 12 of the Report on the Principles of a Model Provincial Constitution regarding the appointment of Ministers in Provinces, C.A.D., Vol. IV, L.S.S., 17 July 1947, pp. 631-632

[2] Debate on Motion regarding Draft Constitution, C.A.D., Vol. VII, L.S.S., 8 November 1948, pp. 305-307

[3] Consideration of Article 24 of the Draft Constitution, C.A.D., Vol. IX, L.S.S., 12 September 1949, pp. 1293-1302

[4] *(4) If any Bill pending before the Legislature of a State at the commencement of this Constitution has, after it has been passed by such Legislature, received the assent of the President, the law so assented to shall not be called in question in any court on the ground that it contravenes the provisions of clause (2) of this article.* Article 24 of the Draft Constitution, C.A.D., Vol. IX, L.S.S., 10 September 1949.

[5] *Any law of a State enacted, not more than one year before the commencement of this Constitution, may within three months from such commencement be submitted by the Governor of the State to the President for his certification; and thereupon, if the President by public notification so certifies, it shall not be called in question in any court on the ground that it contravenes the provisions of clause (2) of this article or sub-section (2) of section 299 of the Government of India Act, 1935.* Article 24 of the Draft Constitution, C.A.D., Vol. IX, L.S.S., 10 September 1949.

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extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgglefindmkaj/https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00856401.2021.1878418

https://www.ndtv.com/people/from-purdah-to-parliament-begum-aizaz-rasul-1652956

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*From **Pardah** to **Parliament***

To read the book, kindly visit the Web Links:

[01] https://www.ndtv.com/people/from-purdah-to-parliament-begum-aizaz-rasul-1652956

[02] https://archive.org/details/frompurdahtoparl0000ikra

[03] https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311806992 'From Purdah to Parliament' The Twentieth Century According to Shaista Ikramullah

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Begum Aizaz Rasul



Begum Aizaz Rasul, from a 1938 issue of *The Indian Listener*

Member of [Constituent Assembly of India](#)

In office

9 December 1946 – 24 January 1950

Personal details

|                   |                                                                                                            |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Born</b>       | Begum Saheba Qudsia                                                                                        |
|                   | 2 April 1909<br><a href="#">Lahore</a> , <a href="#">Punjab</a> , <a href="#">British India</a>            |
| <b>Died</b>       | 1 August 2001 (aged 92)<br><a href="#">Lucknow</a> , <a href="#">Uttar Pradesh</a> , <a href="#">India</a> |
| <b>Occupation</b> | Politician, writer, social activist                                                                        |
| <b>Known for</b>  | Only <a href="#">Muslim</a> woman to be a member of the <a href="#">Constituent Assembly of India</a>      |
| <b>Awards</b>     | <a href="#">Padma Bhushan</a> (2000)                                                                       |

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begum\\_Aizaz\\_Rasul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begum_Aizaz_Rasul)

**Begum Qudsia Aijaz Rasul** (2 April 1909 – 1 August 2001) was the only [Muslim](#) woman in the [Constituent Assembly of India](#) that drafted the [Constitution of India](#).

**Family**

Begum Rasool was born on 2 April 1909 as Qudsia Begum, daughter of Sir Zulfiqar Ali Khan by his wife Mahmuda Sultana. Her father, Sir Zulfiqar, belonged to a collateral branch of the ruling family of [Malerkotla](#) princely

state in Punjab. Her mother, Mahmuda Sultan, was the daughter of Nawab Allauddin Ahmed Khan, Nawab of Loharu.

Qudsia was married in 1929, to Nawab Aijaz Rasul, the *taluqdar* (landowner) of Sandila in Hardoi district of what was then Oudh (now a part of Uttar Pradesh). The match was arranged by Sir Malcolm Hailey and the marriage was entirely harmonious. Two years after the wedding, her father died in 1931. Shortly after this happened, her in-laws came and took her away to Sandila, which was to be her home in life and where she lies buried after her death. In Sandila, Qudsia came to be addressed after her husband's name as "Begum Aijaz Rasool," and this is the name by which she is known in all public records.

### Political career

With the enactment of the *Government of India Act 1935*, the couple joined the Muslim League and entered electoral politics. In the 1937 elections, she was one of the few women who successfully contested from a non-reserved seat and was elected to the U.P legislative assembly. Begum Aijaz Rasul remained a member until 1952. She held the office of the Deputy President of the council from 1937 to 1940 and acted as the Leader of Opposition in the council from 1950 to 1952–54. She was the first woman in India and the first Muslim woman in the world to reach this position. Despite her family background, she was known for her strong support for zamindari abolition. She also strongly opposed the demand for separate electorates based on religion.

In 1946, she was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India and was one of 28 Muslim League members who finally joined. She was the only Muslim woman in the Assembly. In 1950, the Muslim League in India dissolved and Begum Aijaz Rasul joined the Congress. She was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1952-54 and was a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly from 1969 to 1989.

Between 1969 and 1971, she was the Minister for Social Welfare and Minorities. In 2000, she was awarded a Padma Bhushan for her contribution to social work.

### Role in the Constituent Assembly

With the partition of India, only a handful of Muslim League members joined the Constituent Assembly of India. Begum Aizaz Rasul was elected the Deputy Leader of the Delegation and the Deputy leader of Opposition in the Constituent Legislative Assembly. When Chaudhry Khaliquzzaman, the party leader left for Pakistan, Begum Aijaz succeeded him as the leader of the Muslim League and became a member of the Minority Rights Drafting Subcommittee.

Begum Aijaz Rasul was instrumental in creating consensus amongst the Muslim leadership to voluntarily give up the demand for reserved seats for



religious minorities. During the discussions pertaining to the right of minorities in an assembly of the Drafting Committee, she opposed the idea of having 'separate electorates' for Muslims. She quoted the idea as 'a self-destructive weapon which separates the minorities from the majority for all time'. By 1949, the Muslim members who wished for the retention of separate electorates came around to accept Begum's appeal.

**Sports patronage**

She held the office of President of the [Indian Women Hockey Federation](#) for 20 years and was also President of the [Asian Women's Hockey Federation](#). The Indian Women's Hockey Cup is named after her (Begum Rasul trophy). Maintaining a keen interest in sport, she even donned men's whites to bat for the President's XI vs. the Prime Minister's XI, goodwill match in 1952.

**Writings**

A widely travelled person, Begum Rasul was a member of Prime Minister's Goodwill Delegation to Japan in 1953 and Indian Parliamentary Delegation to Turkey in 1955. She also took keen interest in literature and authored the book *Three Weeks in Japan* and contributed to various newspapers and magazines. Her autobiography is titled *From Purdah to Parliament: A Muslim Woman in Indian Politics*.

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**Parallel lives but on opposite paths**  
**Jinnah and his Feminine Antonym Begum Rasul**  
<https://www.newindianexpress.com/web-only/2024/Dec/25/parallel-lives-but-on-opposite-paths-jinnah-and-his-feminine-antonym-begum-qudsia>

*On Pakistan's Quaid-e-Azam Day, finding a reverse parallel between the lives of M.A. Jinnah and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul who may be called Jinnah's feminine antonym.*

**Parallel Lives ( Bioi parallēloi )** is an impressive collection of comparative biographies of celebrated Greek and Roman soldiers, legislators, orators, and statesmen written by the Greek author Plutarch. By comparing a great Roman with an illustrious Greek, Plutarch intended to provide ideal patterns of behaviour and to encourage mutual understanding between Greeks and Romans. Likewise, an incisive historical investigation can unearth some reverse parallel lives too. The lives of Pakistan's Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul, the sole Muslim lady member of the Constituent Assembly of India, reflects such a reverse parallel.

Jinnah started his public life as the highly praised ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity and a great liberal secularist and agonizingly metamorphosed into a reckless Commander-in-Chief of Muslim communalism and separatism. Whereas Begum Qudsia Aizaz Rasul who opened her political innings as a prominent Muslim League leader with a feudal background eventually evolved to a secular and progressive leader of the Indian National Congress. Jinnah, in his early years, opposed the Muslim League's demand for a separate electorate for Indian Muslims. But in the late 1930s he became the Apostle of a separate nation for Muslims. Begum Aizaz Rasul, who campaigned for the Pakistan Movement and was elected to the Constituent Assembly on the Muslim League ticket, eventually played a critical role in putting an end to the flawed system of separate electorate in independent India. The feminine protagonist, even though she is much less known while compared to her masculine counterpart, has a better message for the audience at the coda of this tragicomedy.

### **Romeo-turned-Macbeth**

Jinnah was an ardent bardolator who aspired to play Romeo's role in the Globe Theatre. But in real life he became a Macbeth as Kiran Doshi reimagined him in his 2015 historical fiction *Jinnah Often Came to Our House*. A well-educated barrister-debonair who loathed Islamic orthodoxy, driven by his hubris and ambition, Jinnah almost single-handedly changed the history of the Indian subcontinent by doing everything that he had opposed for most of his political career until the fateful 1937 Indian provincial elections. He incited communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and thus, became the poster boy for the British policy of 'Divide & Rule'.

After the Partition and the bloodbath, Jinnah reverted back to his inclusive liberal secular rhetoric. In the famed 11 August 1947 speech in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly which expressed fierce opposition to the idea of an Islamic State as advocated by figures like Abul Ala Maududi, he declared: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State ... you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State". By making this volte face, he again practised Macbeth's mantra of "Fair is foul and foul is fair".

Stanley Wolpert bewildered by the 11 August 1947 speech in his *Jinnah of Pakistan* wrote that the cyclone of events probably disoriented Jinnah and he was arguing the opposition's brief, pleading for a united India – on the eve of Pakistan! It was too late and the later history of Pakistan ruthlessly betrayed the 11 August 1947 ex cathedra. Fatima Jinnah, heir to Jinnah's secular legacy, was humiliated by the military junta and the 1965 presidential election was stolen from her. Like Macbeth, the Jinnah drama too ended up in a tragedy.

## Unbecoming of Jinnah

Jinnah joined the Indian National Congress in 1904. As a Rolls Royce lawyer of the Bombay Bar, he contributed a whopping donation of Rs 1000 per month to the Congress in 1914. By this time, he joined the All-India Muslim League with a specific purpose of wresting it from the old guard aristocratic British cronies like Aga Khan and his mission was a huge success. Jinnah was at this time entirely unsympathetic to Muslim exceptionalism.

While welcoming Mahatma Gandhi who was coming from South Africa in 1915, Jinnah praised the Hindu-Muslim unity during Gandhi's South African struggle: "two sister communities stood in absolute union and it had its moral and political effect". Addressing the Bombay Muslim Students' Union in the same year, he exhorted the Muslim youth telling them that their chief object should always be cooperation, unity, and goodwill, not only among the different sections of Muslims but also between Muslims and other communities of the country. He soon became the 'Muslim Gokhale', a voice of reason and constitutional method.

Jinnah was the chief architect of the Lucknow Pact between the INC and the AIML. The pact effectively addressed the contentious issue of adequate representation for Hindus and Muslims in legislative bodies.

Jinnah became a darling of the nationalist circles and the *Bombay Chronicle* wrote on 23 October 1916: "Men like Jinnah are not only the trusty exponents of public opinion but true builders of the future constitution of India". The tragedy is that the same Jinnah became a votary of communal politics and the two-Nation theory in the late 1930s.

Jinnah's political career turned astonishingly Janus-faced after that. He was always a secular liberal nationalist at heart, but sacrificed these credentials on the altar of Machiavellian politics.

"Now more than ever, we need Jinnah's pre-1937 politics in both India and Pakistan. A pro-minority consociational equipoise is now needed more than ever, given the steady descent of both countries into cesspool of majoritarian tyranny, constitutional politics aimed at giving a voice to all sections and classes at the centre is a noble objective," Yasser Latif Hamdani wrote in his *Jinnah: A Life* (2020). Sadly, he let go of these ideals entirely when they came in the way of his ambitions.

## From Pakistan Movement to secular India

Journeying in the other direction was Begum Aizaz Rasul whose personal profiles was in sharp contrast to that of Jinnah.

Jinnah hailed from a middle-class family whose lineage traces back to Hindu Rajputs of Sahiwal in Punjab, converted to Islam in the 18th century.



Begum Qudsia was born to the royal family of Malerkotla in Punjab having a long history of Islamic tradition.

“An adroit politician she was able to harness her environment and would go on to challenge patriarchy and champion secular and liberal ideas at a time when bigotry and communal passions ran high. Although elected to the Constituent Assembly as a representative of the Muslim League, she was vocal against having separate electorates, one of the principal causes her party advocated. On her way to charting a successful career in public service, Qudsia broke many norms including the purdah,” wrote Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali in their *The Fifteen: The Lives and Times of the Women in India’s Constituent Assembly* (2024).

On 22 November 1949, Begum Aizaz Rasul stated in the Constituent Assembly: “I look forward to the day when individuals will cease to regard themselves as members of religious minorities. But this can only be done if and when the majority also cease to be conscious of their majority and members of communities, big or small, sincerely and simultaneously begin to consider themselves and one another as full and equal citizens of a Secular State.”

In March 1940 at Lahore, Jinnah who had then became a staunch communalist, exhorted the Muslims to prepare for final confrontation and to come forward as the servants of Islam. Qudsia enthusiastically supported the idea of a separate Muslim nation. She said: “Every child in every Muslim home is being brought up in the spirit of Pakistan and women will make their share of sacrifice if bloodshed comes.”

But soon, she realized the danger of the Pakistan idea. After the Partition, she opted for secular India over theocratic Pakistan. She opposed the idea of separate electorate for minorities in the Constituent Assembly and called it a self-destructive weapon that perpetuates communalism and separatism. Begum Qudsia advised Indian Muslims to throw themselves entirely upon the goodwill of the majority community and pave the way for a secular democratic state. In 1950, she joined the Congress and served in many prestigious posts until her death in 2001.

The South Asian trio -- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh -- have a useful lesson to learn from the antonymous parallel lives of Jinnah and Qudsia -- parochial communalism delivers short-term results but will soon become a Frankenstein’s monster as in the case of Jinnah; but pragmatic secularism gives durable benefits as the Begum realised after the bloody Partition.

(Faisal C.K. is Deputy Law Secretary to the Government of Kerala.  
Views are personal. Email: [faisal.chelengara10@gmail.com](mailto:faisal.chelengara10@gmail.com))

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## Dakshayani Velayudhan

(04.07.1912 - 20.07.1978)

### Brief Profile

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/dakshayani-velayudhan/>

#### Early Life

Dakshayani Velayudhan was [born](#) on 4 July 1912 in Mulavukad a small island in the present-day Ernakulam district. She belonged to the Pulaya community, which was assigned to the rear end of the rigorously oppressive caste system. Pulayas were mostly engaged as lowly-paid agricultural labourers, and subjected to a range of humiliations including being barred from using public roads, maintaining a certain distance from upper caste persons, and the women prohibited from covering their upper bodies with any garment.

An important event was held in Kochi in 1913, in the form of the *Kayal Sammelanam*. Hundreds of Pulayas, including Velayudhan's family members, came together and met on small boats in Kerala's backwaters, as they were barred from assembling on land. The event clearly had a significant impact on Dakshayani's life, who is said to have [requested](#) that her biography be titled 'The Sea has no Caste.'

#### Role in India's Independence Movement

Velayudhan was inspired to enter active politics by her family members' active [involvement](#) in civil disobedience movements against upper-caste diktats.

Velayudhan emerged as a fierce critic of Congress politics, [writing strongly](#) against them in the All India Scheduled Castes Federation's (AISCF) weekly journal, Jai Bheem. At the same time, she was also critical of the AISCF and B.R. Ambedkar's politics, specifically their demand for separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes.

Fierce often sexist attacks, from both Congress and AISCF followed. Fervent petitions were addressed to the Congress high command by opposing her nomination to the Constituent Assembly. In spite of these she was elected to the body in 1946.

In 1945, she had also been [nominated](#) to the Cochin Legislative Council.

#### Contribution to Constitution Making

Velayudhan was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Madras constituency. At the age of 34, she was one of the youngest and the only Dalit woman member of the Constituent Assembly.

In the Assembly, Velayudhan emerged as a strong, independent voice, unafraid to go against popular opinion. Velayudhan made her inaugural intervention during the Assembly's response to [Nehru's Objective Resolution](#). Asserting that although there were several models to follow when framing a constitution, she [emphasized](#) that the Indian Constitution had a more substantial task than simply mediating the relationship between state and society; it had to overhaul society itself.

Velayudhan also took on B.R Ambedkar and M Nagappa on an amendment that would have required a reserved seat candidate to secure a minimum proportion of votes from Scheduled Caste voters, arguing that this was akin to separate electorates.

Velayudhan held strong views on the type of federalism that India should adopt. Her critique of the Draft Constitution of India 1948 focused on the lack of decentralization and the potential for a strong central government to dominate over state governments. She specifically [highlighted](#) the method of appointing Governors of states, which she argued would further centralize power.

### **Later contributions**

Velayudhan was a part of the Provincial Parliament together with her husband, arguably making them the first Dalit couple in the Parliament.

She continued her civil society work with a focus on Dalit rights. In 1977, she [set up](#) a women's rights organization Mahila Jagriti Parishad in Delhi.

In 2019, the Kerala Government instituted the [Dakshayani Velayudhan award](#), which is to be bestowed on women who work towards the empowerment of other women in the state.

She passed away on 20 July 1978, at the age of 66.

### **Key Speeches**

1. During the [Objectives Resolution](#) debate (precursor to the [Preamble](#) of the Constitution), Velayudhan noted that communalism was antithetical to nationalism. Further, she [believed](#) that the emancipation of Harijans depended on adopting a set of '*moral safeguards*'.
2. Contrary to other members from the minority communities, she [opposed](#) separate electorates for Harijans.



3. Criticizing the centralizing tendency of the Draft Constitution, she called for a more decentralized system that would actually strengthen India's unity.
4. She strongly supported the inclusion of a Fundamental Right against exploitation and forced labour, calling out the '*fascist social structure existing in India.*'
5. When the Assembly discussed untouchability (Article 17 of the Constitution of India), she argued that the best way to address untouchability was through sustained state propaganda and not through punishment.

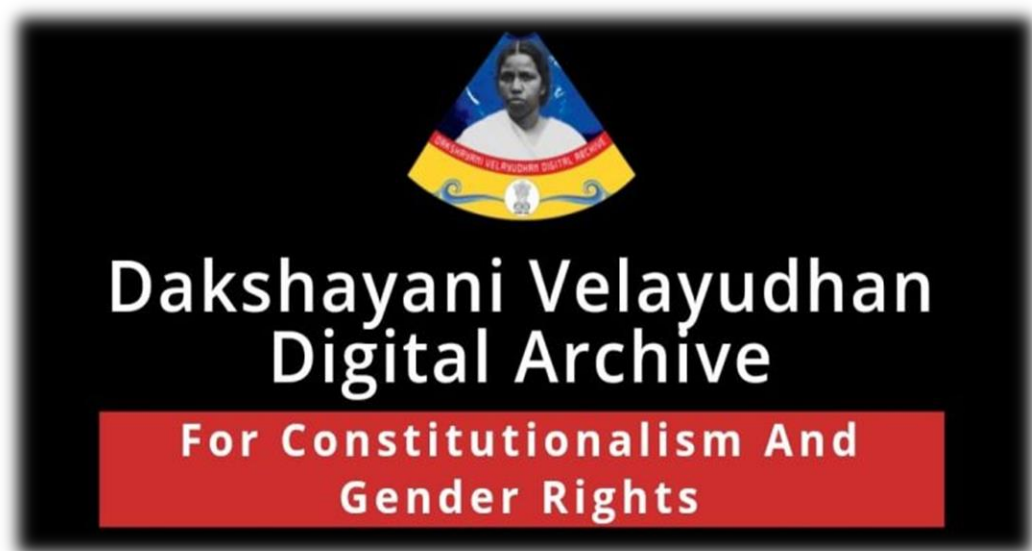
### Resources:

1. [Founding Mothers of the Indian Republic: Gender Politics of the Framing of the Constitution](#) by Achyut Chetan, Cambridge University Press, 2022.
2. ["Remembering Dakshayani Velayudhan, the lone Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly"](#) by Saritha S Balan, The NewsMinute, 2018.

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 Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala  
 महात्मा गांधी विश्वविद्यालय, केरल



<https://www.mgu.ac.in/digital-archives-of-dakshayani-velayudhan-to-inspire-generations/>

The School of Indian Legal Thought at Mahatma Gandhi University is offering the younger generation an opportunity to delve into the life and legacy of Dakshayani Velayudhan, the sole Dalit woman and youngest member of the Indian Constituent Assembly. Digital archives documenting her remarkable life, invaluable contributions, and service to the nation will be inaugurated by the Minister for Industries and Law, P. Rajeev, on November 26.

These archives, developed with financial assistance from the state government, feature her significant speeches in the Constituent Assembly, information about other women members of the Assembly, and landmark Supreme Court judgments on gender justice and women's safety.

The inauguration ceremony is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. at the School of Indian Legal Thought, with Vice Chancellor Dr. C.T. Aravindakumar presiding over the event. Speakers at the ceremony include Syndicate members Adv. Reji Zachariah, Dr. Beena Mathew, University Registrar Dr. Bismi Gopalakrishnan, and Archives Coordinator Dr. P.M. Arathi.

The programme will also feature a lecture by Prof. Kalpana Kannabiran at 10:30 a.m., chaired by Prof. Mohan Gopal. Historian and daughter of Dakshayani Velayudhan, Prof. Meera Velayudhan, will also deliver a special address.

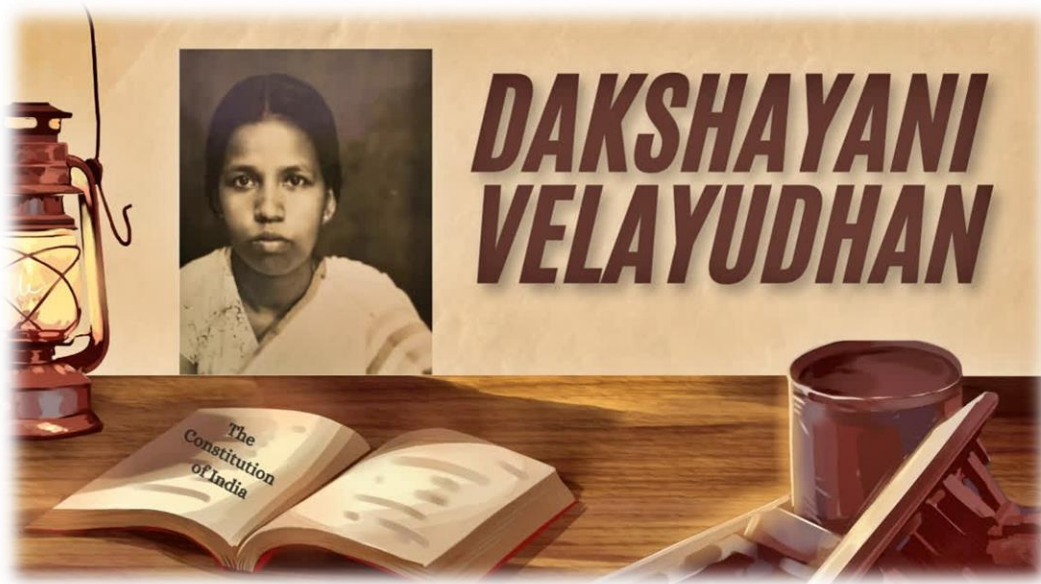


Who Brought Inclusion  
to The Indian Constitution

<https://www.etvbharat.com/en/lifestyle/republic-day-dakshayani-velayudhan-dalit-woman-inclusion-constitution-india-enn25012502159>

Through Dakshayani Velayudhan's efforts, fundamental rights like equality, non-discrimination, and social justice became integral to the Constitution of India.

History has a funny way of turning its eyes on the obvious heroes: those who shouted loudest, fought fiercest, or scribbled their names in the largest font. But sometimes, history misses the quiet revolutionaries, the ones who didn't fit the hero mould. Dakshayani Velayudhan (the only Dalit woman in the Indian Constituent Assembly) is one of them.



**Dakshayani Velayudhan was the only Dalit woman in the Indian Constituent Assembly.**

Back in 1946, India was on the cusp of freedom, but that freedom wasn't going to be handed out like free candy. It was being bargained for, argued over, and chiseled into shape. Enter **Dakshayani, the daughter of a Dalit farmer in Kerala**, walking into the Constituent Assembly with her head held high. For context, this was an era when Dalit women weren't supposed to walk *anywhere*, let alone into the halls of power. But there she was, a product of Mahatma Gandhi's vision and Baba Ambedkar's fire. She was determined not just to sit at the table but to pull up a chair for everyone else left out.

### **Contribution To the Constitution**

Dakshayani wasn't there for symbolic representation. No, she had work to do. She stood in a room full of upper-caste men and dared to speak about equality. She **rejected separate electorates for Dalits**, arguing instead for integration. "Separate electorates will only divide us," she said in her speech in the assembly, insisting that India needed unity, not more divisions. She was clear-eyed about the danger of tokenism, knowing that real equality doesn't come from handouts but from systemic change.

Let's talk about the grit it took. This wasn't just a woman navigating a male-dominated space. This was a Dalit woman stepping into a space dominated



by caste privilege. Imagine the courage required to talk about untouchability when untouchables weren't even supposed to share the same water source. And yet, Dakshayani confronted, she argued, and she dared to dream of a Constitution that wouldn't just promise equality but would demand it.

Dakshayani also **worked to ensure that untouchability was abolished**, pressing for it to be not just discouraged but made unconstitutional. She drew from her own experiences as a Dalit woman to highlight the struggles of marginalized communities and pushed for provisions that would guarantee social justice and dignity for all. Through her efforts, fundamental rights like equality, non-discrimination, and social justice became **integral to the Constitution of India**.

### **The Revolution Continued**

But Dakshayani's story doesn't end with her speeches. After the Constitution was drafted and India became a republic, she returned to Kerala, where she continued to fight for social justice. Her work in **education and social reform** was transformative. She understood that revolution doesn't always look like a storm. Sometimes, it's the steady drip of water carving a path through stone.

Flash forward to 2025. Women in Indian politics have come far, but have they come far enough? We have women in Parliament, women running states, and women in the Supreme Court. But for every woman who rises to power, there are millions still silenced by the weight of tradition and inequality. Representation is just the first step, and the real work lies in reshaping the systems that hold us back.

As we celebrate Republic Day 2025, let's not just remember the heroes carved into our textbooks. Let's also remember the ones like Dakshayani, who carved a place for themselves in history by refusing to accept the roles they were given. Her legacy isn't just a footnote in the story of India's independence, it's a challenge to every generation that follows. Be bold. Be

relentless. And most importantly, be unafraid to walk into history, even if you have to kick the door open yourself.

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*Dakshayani Velayudhan*

*Dalit woman*

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/kerala/remembering-dakshayani-velayudhan-lone-dalit-woman-constituent-assembly-92265>

*Dakshayani's daughter Meera speaks to TNM about her fiery mother and what she stood for.*



Remembering Dakshayani Velayudhan, the lone Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly.

Author

Saritha S Balan

On November 26, Constitution Day, Kerala is commemorating Dakshayani Velayudhan, the Dalit woman who forged her own path and stood up for the rights of women and people from oppressed castes. At a time when the

state is grappling with the Sabarimala row, and women in the menstruating age bracket have been prevented from entering the temple despite the Supreme Court's order allowing them to do so, Dakshayani's fight takes on new significance.

The social reform movements in Kerala, which were led by great visionaries, have been cited often by the Kerala CM to explain to the public why some traditions deserve to be broken. Among these leaders is Dakshayani Velayudhan who was a member of BR Ambedkar's Constituent Assembly, the body that formulated the Constitution of India. Of the 299 members in this Assembly, only 15 were women. And of the 15, she was the only Dalit woman.

On November 29, 1948, Dakshayani delivered a speech in the Assembly about untouchability. But before she could finish, she was interrupted by the Chair, Vice President of the Constituent Assembly HC Mookherjee. The Vice President said she had exceeded her time limit, and that he was letting her continue "only because you are a lady."

However, her first speech in the Constituent Assembly focused on slavery.

Speaking to TNM, Dakshayani's daughter Meera said, "This speech was a clear articulation of what was to become Article 15 of the Constitution. Meeting Ambedkar was momentous in her life. From being Editor of Gandhi Era publication in early 1940s in Madras, she became editor of Jai Bheem publication, also from Madras."

Meera Velayudhan is a Policy Analyst. Meera is actively involved in the debates supporting women's entry into Sabarimala, highlighting the constitutional value of the SC verdict. She is also part of 'Samam' Progressive Forum for women.

"Some of her own awareness was drawn from her household and family which played a role in founding the Pulaya Mahajana Sabha (1913), which was formed to offer resistance to the day-to-day life of a Dalit, and which later became a platform of bringing Dalit life to the public. My mother wrote: "My two elder brothers and my father Kunjan's younger brother, Krishnethi (Krishnadiyasan- 1877-1937) , Pt. Karruppan( Prof. Mahrajas College), TK Krishna Menon (from the Thottikal family which produced several Dewans) formed the Pulaya Mahajana Sabha, with Krishnethi as President," Meera adds.



"There were many firsts in Dakshayani's life - the first Dalit girl to attend school wearing an upper cloth, the first Dalit woman graduate in India, a science graduate, member of the Cochin Legislative Council and the Constituent Assembly of India. There were many assertions too - of not walking with shoulders bent or not making way for upper castes while walking on the road," Meera recalls.

In one of her debates, Dakshayani memorably said, "I submit that a Constituent Assembly not only frames a constitution but also gives the people a new framework for life. To frame such a constitution is an easy task because there are many models for us to imitate...but to renew a people on a new foundation requires the synthetic vision of a planner...what we want is not all kinds of safeguards. It is the moral safeguards that give us real protection. What we want is the immediate removal of our social disabilities. Our freedom can be obtained only from Indians and not only from the British Government." ( Dakshayani Velayudhan, 19 Dec, 1946, CA debates)



**Meera Velayudhan**

Born in 1912, the time that she lived in itself is testimony to her struggle as a woman and as a Dalit, since the oppression of both was considered 'natural' at that time. She created history by covering the upper part of her body at a time when women from oppressed castes were not allowed to cover their breasts. Later (from 1813 to 1859) the state witnessed the Maru Marakkal Samaram or Channar revolt for women's right to wear clothes to cover their upper body.

Dakshayani had other unique achievements to her credit, too. She was the first woman to pass ESLC (Education equivalent to that of present time's tenth standard) and the first Indian Dalit woman to become a graduate.

Even the very name Dakshayani challenged the existing caste hegemony as it was a name believed to be reserved for the upper castes (Dakshayani is another name for goddess Parvathy).

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<https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/women-in-cad-ii/>

The manifestation of gender discrimination, though vivid and necessary, tend to entomb intersections of caste and religion. In moments of recognising the making of a woman and her gendered reality, it is essential to talk of those women who stood despite graded inequalities.

In 1945, Dakshayani was nominated as a member of the Cochin Legislative Council. The very next year she became a member of the Constituent Assembly. Even after her time at the Constituent Assembly, she worked for women and children's right and set up Mahila Jagriti Parishad for slum dwellers in Delhi.

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There's an evident lack of interest in her political and social life and the same goes for the rest of the women who formed a part of the Constituent Assembly.

To talk about Dakshayani Velayudhan then is to recognise her achievements. To reproduce her speech is to recognise her caste and gender. Despite and because of which her voice becomes even more critical today.

**These achievements are more important especially because of the graded inequalities that have existed and incarcerated Dalit women much more than the upper-caste women.**



**Dakshayani Velayudhan with her brother K.K. Madhavan.**

It's only ironic that as we talk about Dakshayani, the first Dalit woman who was part of the Constituent Assembly, we are completing almost six months to the Hathras gangrape and the impunity that played out after the incident. Even after all these years of struggle by various Dalit women activists, the gangrape case and its investigation reasserted the truth of post-colonial subordination and caste violence.

Although by reproducing Dakshayani Velayadun's speech one can't single-handedly counter the history of systemic and social violence inflicted upon Dalit or tribal women. But it's also true that by the means of her speech, Velyadhan continues to live beyond her historical existence. **Therefore, by platforming her voice, we might be able to retain some sense of hope within ourselves and reassert her historical and political agency.**

Dalit women and their bodies were always already incarcerated by the upper-caste male gaze, ousting them from the realm of 'pure'; an attribute that only upper-caste women could possess. The same reflects in data on violence inflicted upon women, more specifically Dalit women, reducing their bodies to a '*site of violence*'. Dakshayani, like every other Dalit woman, had to face the caste system and its abuses. The only difference was that at the time, segregation was even more gruesome and explicit.



Despite being pushed beneath the ground, she made it several feet above it. She **claimed many firsts in her name**, she was the first Dalit woman graduate, a student of B.Sc. chemistry from Maharajas College. Apart from being the first and the only Dalit woman, she was also the youngest in the Constituent Assembly.



**Source: From 'Linking radical traditions and the Contemporary Dalit women's MOVEMENT: An Intergenerational Lens.' by Meera Velayudhan.**

Born in 1912, along the coast of Cochin, Dakshayani Velayudhan defied Brahmanical patriarchy and the upper-caste imagination of a Dalit woman by the mere act of wearing clothes on her upper body. Even the time of her birth was marked by a wave of revolution and resistance led by the Pulaya caste against untouchability and caste violence.

These moments of resistance led by the Dalit community and within her own family could also be responsible for how she formed herself in the world. Her maternal uncle and elder brothers led the *Pulaya Mahajana Sabha* on a raft against casteism. In writing her experiences and interactions with the social and her caste, she wrote,

*"The meeting was held with country boats tied together in the sea in Bolghatty — the sea did not have a caste. In Kochi, the untouchables were not allowed to hold a meeting 'on my land' by the Maharaja. The raft was made by joining together a large number of catamarans with the help and support of the fisherfolk."*

This went on to become the famous Meeting on the *Backwaters in Kerala*, Dakshayani had written in detail about the same. She even decided to name her **biography after the movement**; '*The Sea has No Caste*'.

### **A Dalit Woman in the Constituent Assembly**

From not being able to attend a science experiment in college because of her caste to being a part of the Constituent Assembly, Dakshayani Velayudhan offered a unique resistance.

In her first speech in the Constituent Assembly, she started by paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi, expressing her hope for the 'Harijans' of the new India. Though it is important to note that despite being a staunch follower of Gandhi and using the term 'Harijan', she believed that the terminology alone couldn't eradicate untouchability. According to her,

*"The Independent Socialist Indian Republic can give freedom and equality of status to the Harijans."*

But as she saw it, this equality needed an economic upliftment for the *Harijans* who were being exploited by the 'so-called communists'. Thus, according to her, economic upliftment and moral safeguards would have resulted in the 'social' upliftment of the 'Harijan community'. The same was possible only in the Independent Socialist Indian Republic.

### **Claiming *Harijan's* Right to Representation**

January 27, 1947, she spoke against the seven members who were going to represent the Hindus in the Muslim provinces. In her speech, she had challenged the move and condemned it, claiming inclusivity for Harijans who were very much a part of the Hindus.

*"Sir, I find that no Harijan's name is included among the Hindus. We, Harijans, consider ourselves one with the Hindu community and we have every right to represent the Hindus in the Muslim Provinces. We have every right to represent the Hindus in Bengal or the Hindus in Sindh or Punjab. Somebody remarked now that there are already 7 members of the Harijans on the list. That does not mean that the Harijans have no right to represent the Hindus in the Muslim majority provinces."*

*"So, I simply wanted to bring to the notice of this House that they should not go with the impression that the Harijans here have come only to represent the Harijans of India. We claim that we belong to the Hindu fold. It is the duty of the Hindus to see that the promises that they made should be put into practice by including a Harijan in the list, to represent the Hindus in the Muslim majority provinces. But nobody should be under the impression that I came to speak in this manner here in order that my name may go into the list. I have no desire of that sort because I do not want to represent those provinces, but there are Harijans, who have come from the Muslim majority Provinces, who have every right to represent the Hindus in their Provinces. So, I hope that this House will take into consideration that my opinion is not against the fundamental principle that we are expected to follow."*

*"I wish to bring to the notice of this House that there is provision for seven members to represent the Hindus in the Muslim provinces. I find that no Harijan's name is included among the Hindus. We, Harijans, consider ourselves one with the Hindu community and we have every right to represent the Hindus in the Muslim Provinces. We have every right to represent the Hindus in Bengal or the Hindus in Sindh or Punjab. Somebody remarked now that there are already 7 members of the Harijans"*

*in the list. That does not mean that the Harijans have no right to represent the Hindus in the Muslim majority provinces."*

### **On Decentralisation and the Lack of it.**

On November 8, 1948, when the vice-president decided to let the minority speakers of the house lead the discussion, Dakshayani was one of them. In her speech, she contended that the 'new' draft constitution was a 'replica' of the Government of India Act, 1935. She posed a scathing criticism against the centralisation of power that aped the colonial rule.

*The trouble arose from one point, viz., just as the British administrators who wanted to keep India centrally and provincially as a single unit, we in our bewilderment and anxiety tried to bring India centrally and provincially as a strong unit and this centralisation of power has led to all the troubles.*

*There are two ways of making India a strong unit. One is by the method of centralisation of power and the other is by decentralisation, but centralisation is possible only through a parliamentary system which now goes under the safe words 'democratic methods', but in this draft we can't find anything that is democratic and decentralisation is totally absent. It is a great tragedy that in making the constitution of a great country with thirty crores of people, with a great culture behind it and the great principles and teachings of the greatest man of the world on the surface, we were only able to produce a constitution that is totally foreign to us.*

She had specifically spoken against Dr. Ambedkar's arguments and the continuation of the 1935 Act into the draft of the Constitution, especially concerning the selection of the governor.

*"The Committee feels that if the Governor and the Chief Minister who is responsible to the Legislature are elected by the people then there will be friction between the two. But the remedy they have suggested is worse than the disease. There is a panel and the President is to select from the four one person as a Governor. If the Centre happens to have a Congress President and if a province is having a Socialist majority, suppose the Socialist party recommends three from their party and one from the Congress, certainly the President at the Centre will select the Congressman to be the Governor. Certainly, this will lead to friction. We find that this direct recruitment to Governorship is taken from the Government of India Act and it shows that we have not left out even a comma from it."*

### **A Stance Against Separate Electorate for Harijans**

On August 28, 1947, while divided India was still healing from open scars and newly formed borders after the Partition, the discussion regarding political safeguards for minorities saw the inclusion of 'scheduled caste' and 'scheduled tribe' and exclusion of religious minorities.

Dr Ambedkar was in favour of having separate electorates as he saw it as a solution to 'slavery'. On the other hand, Dakshayani had argued from the nationalist stand of the Congress that was against having a 'separate electorate' for 'scheduled castes'.



Her stand resembled Gandhi’s understanding of a separate electorate but was very far from Ambedkar’s idea of necessitating political safeguards for Scheduled Castes.

*"As long as the Scheduled Castes, or the Harijans or by whatever name they may be called, are economic slaves of other people, there is no meaning demanding either separate electorates or joint electorates or any other kind of electorates with this kind of percentage. (cheers). Personally speaking, I am not in favour of any kind of reservation in any place whatsoever. (hear, hear)."*

*Unfortunately, we had to accept all these things because British Imperialism has left some marks on us and we are always feeling afraid of one another. So, we cannot do away with separate electorates. This joint electorate and reservation of seats also is kind of separate electorates. But we have to put up with that evil because we think that it is a necessary evil.*

*I wanted to oppose this amendment because it will be standing in our way and because when the system is put into actual working it will be standing in the way of Harijans, getting a correct ideology. It is the lack of correct ideology among Harijans that has led them to bring this sort of amendment here. If they think that they can better their lot by standing apart from the other communities, they are in the wrong. They can do better by joining with the majority community and not depending on the votes of their own community. I must assure the Mover of the amendment that the Harijans are not going to gain anything if you get this sort of electorate system. So, I oppose this amendment and I hope that nobody in this House will support the amendment."*

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**Dakshayani Velayudhan**  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakshayani\\_Velayudhan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakshayani_Velayudhan)

| Dakshayani Velayudhan                               |                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Members of the <a href="#">Constituent Assembly</a> |                                                                                               |
| In office<br>November 1946 – 25 January 1950        |                                                                                               |
| Personal details                                    |                                                                                               |
| Born                                                | 4 July 1912<br><a href="#">Mulavukad</a> , <a href="#">Ernakulam</a> , <a href="#">Kerala</a> |
| Died                                                | 20 July 1978 (aged 66)                                                                        |
| Spouse                                              | <a href="#">R. Velayudhan</a>                                                                 |
| Children                                            | Dr. Reghu, Prahladan, Dhruvan, Bhagirath and Meera Velayudhan                                 |
| Parent                                              | <div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Kunjan (father)</li></ul></div>                    |

|                   |                                                              |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Education</b>  | Teachers' training course, <a href="#">Madras University</a> |
| <b>Occupation</b> | Social reformer, worked as an L2 teacher                     |

**Dakshayani Velayudhan** (4 July 1912 – 20 July 1978) was an Indian politician and leader of the [oppressed classes](#). Belonging to the [Pulayar community](#), she was among the first generation of people to be educated from the community. She holds several distinctions including becoming the first woman from her community to wear an [upper cloth](#), the first Scheduled Caste woman graduate in India, a science graduate, a member of the [Cochin Legislative Council](#) and of being one of nine female members of the [Constituent Assembly of India](#). But it is not correct to mention that she was one of the first women from her community to wear an upper cloth. Her elder sister and her mother Thayyithara Maani may be given this credit prior to her. Mother Maani lived up to the post independent period in India and died in 1959.

Honouring Dakshayani Velayudhan, the first and only Dalit woman MLA, the [Kerala government](#) has constituted the '[Dakshayani Velayudhan Award](#)' which will be given to women who contributed in empowering other women in the state. The budget earmarked Rs 2 crore for the award.<sup>[5]</sup> This was announced by the Kerala Finance Minister Dr. [Thomas Isaac](#) during the presentation of Kerala Budget 2019 in the Legislative Assembly on 31 January 2019.

### Early life and education

Dakshayani was born in the [Mulavukad](#) village of the [Kanayannur taluka](#) of [Ernakulam district](#) in 1912. She completed her B.A. in 1935 and went on to complete her teachers' training course from the [Madras University](#) three years later. Her studies were supported by scholarships from the government of the [Cochin State](#). From 1935 to 1945, she worked as a teacher at the Government High Schools in [Trichur](#) and [Tripunithura](#).

### Family

Dakshayani was the daughter of Kallachammuri Kunjhan and his wife Maani (Thayyithara Maaniyamma from Elankunnappuzha of Vypin island). As the house-name of Dakshayani was Kallachammuri, her maiden name was Kallachammuri Kunjhan Dakshayani (KKDakshayani ). She belonged to the Pulaya community, just like her contemporary social worker Vallon K. P. Vallon. Her younger brother K. K. Madhavan was also active in politics and was elected to the Rajya sabha in 1976. She married [R. Velayudhan](#) a Scheduled Caste leader and later [Member of Parliament](#). Their wedding was held at [Sevagram](#) in [Wardha](#) with [Gandhi](#) and [Kasturba](#) as witnesses and a [leper](#) standing in as the priest. The couple had five children Dr. Reghu (previously doctor for Smt. Indira Gandhi), Prahladan, Dhruvan, Bhagirath [Secretary General, The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)] and Meera.

She was also related to [K R Narayanan](#) who later became the [President of India](#).

**Parliamentary career**

In 1945, Dakshayani was nominated to the Cochin Legislative Council by the government of the State.

**Participation in the Constituent Assembly**

Velayudhan was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India by the Council in 1946. She was the first and only Scheduled Caste woman to be elected to the constituent assembly. From 1946-1952 she served as a member of the Constituent Assembly and the [Provisional Parliament of India](#). In Parliament she took special interest in the matters of education especially that of the [Scheduled Castes](#).

**Interventions in the Constituent Assembly**

Although a staunch [Gandhian](#), Dakshayani sided with [B R Ambedkar](#) on many issues relating to the Scheduled Castes during the Constituent Assembly debates. She agreed with Ambedkar giving up the demand for [separate electorates](#) arguing instead for 'moral safeguards' and the immediate removal of their social disabilities.

On 8 November 1948, after Dr [B. R. Ambedkar](#) introduced the draft Constitution for discussion, she expressed her appreciation for the draft while calling for greater decentralisation. She also suggested that the final draft of the Constitution should be adopted following a ratification through a general election.

She intervened again on 29 November 1948, during discussions on draft Article 11, which aimed at prohibiting discrimination on the basis of caste, and was permitted to exceed the time limit by the Vice President of the Constituent Assembly who said, "It is only because you are a lady I am allowing you." Velayudhan called for implementation of non-discrimination provisions through public education and pointed out that it would send a great public signal if the Constituent Assembly were to endorse a resolution condemning caste discrimination. "The working of the Constitution," she said, "will depend on how people conduct themselves in the future, not on the actual execution of the law."


She also contested the general elections of 1971 from the [Adoor Lok Sabha constituency](#) but ended up fourth in a fray of five candidates.

**Later life and death**

Dakshayani was president of the Depressed Classes Youths Fine arts Club and the Managing Editor of *The Common Man* in [Madras](#) from 1946-49. She later became the founder president of the Mahila Jagriti Parishad. Dakshayani died after a short illness in July 1978. She was 66.

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# Durgabai Deshmukh

(15.07.1909 - 09.05.1981)

## Durgabai Deshmukh



Deshmukkh on a 1982 Indian stamp

|            |                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Born       | 15 July 1909<br><a href="#">Rajahmundry</a> , <a href="#">Madras Presidency</a> , <a href="#">British India</a> (now <a href="#">Andhra Pradesh</a> , India) |
| Died       | 9 May 1981 (aged 71)<br><a href="#">Narasannapeta</a> , <a href="#">Andhra Pradesh</a> , India                                                               |
| Alma mater | <a href="#">Madras University</a>                                                                                                                            |
| Spouse     | <a href="#">C.D. Deshmukh</a><br>(m. 1953)                                                                                                                   |
| Awards     | <a href="#">Padma Vibhushan</a>                                                                                                                              |

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durgabai\\_Deshmukh#:~:text=Durgab%C4%81i%20Deshmukh%20\(n%C3%A9%20Gummididala%2C%201915,the%20Planning%20Commission%20of%20India.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Durgabai_Deshmukh#:~:text=Durgab%C4%81i%20Deshmukh%20(n%C3%A9%20Gummididala%2C%201915,the%20Planning%20Commission%20of%20India.)

**Durgabāi Deshmukh** (née **Gummididala**, 15 July 1909 – 9 May 1981) was an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker and politician. She was a member of the [Constituent Assembly of India](#) and of the [Planning Commission of India](#).

A public activist for women's emancipation, she founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha (Andhra Women's Conference) in 1937. She was also the founder chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. In 1953, she married [C.D. Deshmukh](#), the first Indian governor of the [Reserve Bank of India](#) and [Finance Minister](#) in India's Central Cabinet from 1950 to 1956.

**Early life**

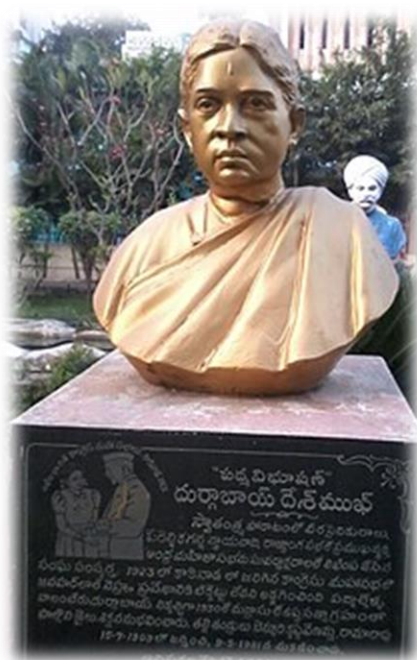
Durgabai Gummididala was born on 15 July, 1909 into a Vaidiki [Brahmin](#) family from [Rajahmundry](#), [Andhra Pradesh](#), [British India](#). Durgabai was married at the age of 8 Subba Rao. She refused to live

with him after her maturation, and her father and brother supported her decision. She later left him to pursue her education.

**Personal life**

In 1953, she married the then Finance Minister of India [Chintaman Deshmukh](#). According to her own account, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the three witnesses. C. D. Deshmukh had a daughter from a previous marriage but the couple remained otherwise childless. Though she had parted ways with Subba Rao, she supported his widow Timmaiamma after his death. Timmaiamma lived with Durgabai and Chintaman Deshmukh, and Durgabai also organised for her to get vocational training. Durgabai Deshmukh authored a book called *The Stone That Speaketh*. Her autobiography *Chintaman and I* was published one year before her death in 1981.

**Career**



Bust of Durgabai Deshmukh in Rajahmundry

From her early years, Durgabai had been associated with Indian politics. At age 12, she left school in protest to the imposition of English-medium education. She later started the Balika Hindi Paathshala in [Rajamundry](#) to promote Hindi education for girls.

When the [Indian National Congress](#) had its conference in her hometown of [Kakinada](#) in 1923, she was a volunteer and placed in charge of the [Khadi](#) exhibition that was running side by side. Her responsibility was to ensure that visitors without tickets didn't enter. She fulfilled the responsibility given to her honestly and even forbade [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) from entering. When the organisers of the exhibition saw what she did and angrily chided her, she replied that she was only following

instructions. She allowed Nehru in only after the organisers bought a ticket for him. Nehru praised the girl for the courage with which she did her duty.

She was a follower of [Mahatma Gandhi](#) in India's struggle for freedom from the [British Raj](#). She never wore jewellery or cosmetics, and she was a satyagrahi. She was a prominent social reformer who participated in Gandhi-led Salt [Satyagraha](#) activities during the [Civil Disobedience Movement](#). She was instrumental in organising women satyagrahis in the movement. This led to British Raj authorities imprisoning her three times between 1930 and 1933.

After her release from prison, Durgabai continued her studies. She finished her B.A. and her M.A. in political science in the 1930s from Andhra University. She went on to obtain her law degree from [Madras University](#) in 1942, and started practicing as an advocate in [Madras High Court](#).

Durgabai was the president of the Blind Relief Association. In that capacity, she set up a school-hostel and a light engineering workshop for the blind.

Durgabai was a member of the [Constituent Assembly of India](#). She was the only woman in the panel of chairmen in the Constituent Assembly. She was instrumental in the enactment of many social welfare laws.

She failed to get elected to Parliament in 1952, and was later nominated to be a member of the [Planning Commission](#). In that role, she mustered support for a national policy on social welfare. The policy resulted in the establishment of a Central Social Welfare Board in 1953. As the Board's first chairperson, she mobilized a large number of voluntary organizations to carry out its programs, which were aimed at education, training, and rehabilitation of needy women, children, and the disabled.

She was the first to emphasise the need to set up separate Family Courts after studying the same during her visit to China in 1953. She discussed the idea with Justice M.C. Chagla and Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar of the Bombay High Court (at that time) and also with [Jawaharlal Nehru](#). With similar demands for speedy justice for women in familial matters from women's movement and organisations, the Family Courts Act was enacted in 1984.

She was the first chairperson of the National Council on Women's Education, established by the Government of India in 1958. In 1959, the committee presented its recommendations, as follows:

1. "The Centre and State Governments should give priority to the education of girls.
2. In the central ministry of education, a department of women's education should be created.
3. For proper education of girls, a Director of Women's Education should be appointed in each state.



- 4. Co-education should be properly organised at higher level of education.
- 5. The University Grants Commission should specify a definite amount separately for the education of girls.
- 6. In the first phase of development, provision of free education should be made for girls up to Class VIII
- 7. Facilities in the choice of optional subjects should be made available for girls.
- 8. Girls should get training facilities on a liberal basis.
- 9. Education of Girls should be given due encouragement in rural areas.
- 10. A large number of seats in various services should be reserved for them.
- 11. Programmes for the development of adult women's education should be properly initiated and encouraged."

To commemorate her legacy, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam has named its Department of Women Studies as [Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Centre for Women's Studies](#).

In 1963, she was sent to Washington D.C. as a member of the Indian delegation to the World Food Congress.

**Contribution in Constituent Assembly**

Durgabai Deshmukh was then elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Madras Province. She was the only woman in the panel of chairmen in the Constituent Assembly. She proposed Hindustani (Hindi+Urdu) as the national language of India but also expressed fear about the forceful campaign for Hindi in South India. She proposed a period of fifteen years of status quo to enable all the non-Hindi speakers to adopt and learn Hindi.

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**KEY SPEECHES**

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/g-durgabai/>

- 1. Durgabai [proposed](#) Hindustani (Hindi + Urdu) as the national language of India. But, in the light of anti-Hindi agitation in South India, she [later argued](#) against adopting Hindi as the national language.
  - 2. When the Assembly discussed provisions relating to the appointment of judges, Durgabai [raised key points](#) regarding maintaining the independence of the judiciary.
  - 3. During the debates on [Article 23](#) which deals with human trafficking, she [argued against](#) including the Devadasi practice in the text of the 'right against exploitation'. She noted that the issue would soon perish and therefore did not require constitutional protection.



# *Durgabai Deshmukh*

## *The Iron lady*

<https://www.thehansindia.com/life-style/durgabai-deshmukh-the-iron-lady-815836>

Durga Bai Deshmukh G. Durgabai was born on 15th July 1909, in Rajahmundry, Kakinada. She was involved in the Indian freedom movement from a very young age: at 12, she quit school to protest the imposition of English as the medium of education.

At the age of 14, she volunteered at a conference held by the Indian National Congress in Kakinada. In May 1930, she participated in Salt Satyagraha in Madras and was imprisoned in 1930 and 1932. In prison, she studied English and completed her M.A. from Andhra University. She went on to study law from Madras University and practised at the Madras Bar for a few years. In 1936, she established Andhra Mahila Sabha to coach young Telugu girls in Madras for their Matriculation examination conducted by the Banaras Hindu University.

Durgabai founded and edited a Telugu journal called Andhra Mahila. Durgabai was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Madras Province. She made several key interventions on issues that include the national language, judicial independence and human trafficking.

After independence, she was a part of key national organizations like the Central Social Welfare Board, and the National Council for Women's Education. She was also a member of the Planning Commission. In 1958, she headed the National Committee on Girls' and Women's Education.

Durgabai was awarded the Nehru Literary Award in 1971 for her contribution to the promotion of literacy in India. She was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1975. The Central Social Welfare Board instituted a yearly award in her name to recognize voluntary organisations for outstanding contribution to women's welfare and empowerment. She passed away on 9th May 1981.

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**DURGABAI DESHMUKH HOSPITAL & RESEARCH CENTER**

<https://durgabaideshmukhhospitals.com/about.html>

History of Durgabai Deshmukh Hospital

Andhra Mahila Sabha, a charitable and service-oriented organization was founded by Dr Smt Durgabai Deshmukh in the year 1948 with a noble vision to service the poor and the needy, especially women. Smt Durgabai, the renowned freedom fighter, a true Gandhian, a woman with a vision for women-welfare. The AMS today with its various wings of schools, colleges and hospitals stands as a testimony to the conviction and dedication of the great lady transforming her vision into the reality.

She started a Nursing home on a humble note with just 15 beds in 1962 in Hyderabad with an objective to serve the poor. This small inception has blossomed into a full-fledged multi-speciality hospital with over 200 beds, called Durgabai Deshmukh Hospital and Research Centre, under the umbrella of Andhra Mahila Sabha.

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# Andhra Mahila Sabha

Andhra Mahila Sabha (AMS) is a premier women’s organization in India working toward the education, economic upliftment, health care, and empowerment of women and children. The forty units under the umbrella of the AMS provide major services in urban and rural areas. Some of the focus areas of the organization include causes dear to its founder, Dr Durgabai Deshmukh, a legendary pioneer in women’s empowerment in 20th Century India. The major services provided by the various institutions established under this organization include:

## Education

Providing training and education to women and children so as to enable them to harness their services toward nation building

## Healthcare

Providing outreach and free health care to the needy and the rehabilitation and mainstreaming of disabled children.

## Upliftment and Empowerment

Enabling literacy and formal education, family counselling and legal aid, teacher training and public awareness campaigns on education and health

## Old Age Care

Providing shelter and food at affordable price to the needy senior citizens who desire to live the remaining years of their lives respectably.

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## The Inspiring Life Durgabai Deshmukh

<https://observoice.com/15-july-remembering-durgabai-deshmukh-on-her-birth-anniversary-7967/>

**Durgabai Deshmukh** (15 July 1909 – 9 May 1981), an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker, and politician. She was a public activist for women’s emancipation and [the founder of Andhra Mahila Sabha](#). She was also the founder chairperson of the central social welfare board.

## Early Life and Education

Durgabai Deshmukh, a prominent Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, and social worker, was born on [July 15](#), 1909, in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, then part of the Madras

Presidency under British India. She was born into a Telugu-speaking family and was married at the tender age of eight to her cousin, Subba Rao. However, she refused to live with him post-puberty, a decision supported by her father and brother, which was quite progressive for that time. Her early education was marked by a bold step when she left school at the age of 12 to protest against the imposition of English-medium education, which was a reflection of her nationalistic spirit even at a young age. She later pursued her education at Madras University, balancing her academic pursuits with her active participation in the Indian freedom movement. Durgabai's early life was thus characterized by her determination to educate herself and her unwavering commitment to the fight for India's independence.

**Career and Achievements**

Durgabai Deshmukh was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker, and politician. Her career was marked by significant contributions to India's struggle for independence and post-independence social development. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, she played a pivotal role in shaping the Indian Constitution. She founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha in 1937, which aimed at empowering women through education and vocational training. Her efforts in social welfare led her to establish the Central Social Welfare Board, serving as its chairperson. Durgabai's dedication to public service earned her numerous accolades, including the prestigious Padma Vibhushan, the UNESCO Award for outstanding work in literacy, and the Nehru Literacy Award. Her autobiography, 'Chintaman and I', provides a personal glimpse into her life and the challenges she overcame. Durgabai Deshmukh's legacy continues to inspire generations of social activists and reformers in India and beyond. Her life's work remains a testament to her unwavering commitment to social justice and education.

**Notable Events and Milestones**

Durgabai Deshmukh life was marked by significant events and milestones that not only shaped her legacy but also had a profound impact on Indian society and culture. At the tender age of 12, she left school to protest against the imposition of English-medium education, a decision that reflected her early commitment to the Indian freedom movement and her dedication to promoting national language education. She established the Balika Hindi Paathshala in Rajamundry to provide Hindi education for girls, challenging the prevailing norms of her time. Durgabai's involvement in the Indian National Congress at a young age showcased her political acumen and her unwavering commitment to the cause of independence. Her audacity as a young volunteer at the Congress conference in Kakinada in 1923, where she insisted that Jawaharlal Nehru buy a ticket to enter the khadi exhibition, is a testament to her principled stand and integrity. Her marriage at the age of 8, which she later annulled to pursue education and social work, further underscores her determination to break free from the shackles of traditional societal expectations.

As a freedom fighter, Durgabai was arrested twice between 1930 and 1934 for her participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, demonstrating her courage and sacrifice for the nation's freedom. Her founding of the Andhra Mahila Sabha in 1937 marked a significant contribution to women's empowerment and social welfare,

establishing a platform for addressing the issues faced by women in society. Her role as the founder chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board further solidified her commitment to social justice and welfare initiatives.

Durgabai's marriage to C.D. Deshmukh, the first Indian governor of the Reserve Bank of India and Finance Minister, in 1953, brought together two influential figures in Indian politics and economics, creating a powerful alliance that contributed to the nation's development. Her literary contributions, including her autobiography 'Chintaman and I,' provide a personal account of her life's journey and her partnership with her husband, offering insights into the era's socio-political landscape.

Read More: [16 July in Indian and World History](#)

Durgabai Deshmukh's lasting impact on history is evident in her contributions to the drafting of India's Constitution as a member of the Constituent Assembly and her work with the Planning Commission of India, where she played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's developmental policies. Her advocacy for women's rights and education, her involvement in the freedom struggle, and her efforts in social reform have left an indelible mark on Indian society. She died [on 9 May](#) 1981, in Andhra Pradesh, India.

### **Awards And Honors**

Below are the prestigious awards and honors received:

- **Padma Vibhushan:** Durgabai Deshmukh was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award, for her exceptional and distinguished service.
- **Paul G Hoffman Award:** She received this award for her outstanding contribution to social service.
- **Nehru Literacy Award:** This award was given to her in recognition of her efforts in promoting literacy.
- **UNESCO Award:** Durgabai Deshmukh was honored with this award for her outstanding work in the field of literacy.
- **Elected Member of the Constituent Assembly:** While not an award, being elected to the Constituent Assembly of India is a significant recognition of her contributions to the drafting of the Indian Constitution.
- **Recognition for her role in women's rights:** Her efforts in advocating for women's rights and property rights were acknowledged by constitutional experts during the formation of the Indian Constitution.

### **Additional Resources**

#### **Books:**

- "Chintaman and I" – An autobiography by Durgabai Deshmukh herself, offering a personal look into her life and work.
- "The Stone That Speaketh" – Another book authored by Durgabai Deshmukh.

- “The Fifteen: Lives and times of 15 remarkable women” – This book includes stories of Durgabai Deshmukh and other women who were part of the Constituent Assembly of India.

**Documentaries:**

- “Makers of Indian Constitution | Durgabai Deshmukh” – A documentary available on YouTube that highlights her contributions to the Indian Constitution and her role as a social activist.
- “Durgabai Deshmukh: A legacy beyond time” – A feature that delves into her legacy and her work with the Planning Commission of India and the Central Social Welfare Board.

**Museums:**

- The Allahabad Museum – Although not exclusively dedicated to Durgabai Deshmukh, this museum is a rich repository of Indian history and culture and may have exhibits related to her and the freedom struggle.
- Durgabai Deshmukh Centre for Women’s Studies at Andhra University – While not a museum, this center is named in her honor and is dedicated to research and studies on women’s issues, reflecting her lifelong commitment to women’s empowerment.

These resources can provide a comprehensive understanding of Durgabai Deshmukh’s life, her contributions to Indian society, and her role in the country’s history.

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Durgabai Deshmukh

Non-Cooperation Movement

<https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-reopsitory-detail.htm?19928>



Durgabai Deshmukh was an Indian freedom fighter and social activist. She was the first woman to be elected to the Constituent Assembly of India. She was the wife of Chintamanrao Deshmukh, the first Finance Minister of independent India. She



is known for her participation in the Non-Cooperation Movement at a very young age from the current district of East Godavari in Andhra Pradesh.

From her early years, Durgabai was associated with Indian politics. At the age of 12, she left school in protest against the introduction of English-medium education. Later she started Balika Hindi Pathshala in Rajahmundry to promote Hindi education for girls. In 1923, when the Indian National Congress convention took place in her hometown of Kakinada, she was a volunteer and in charge of the Khadi Exhibition, which was running simultaneously. Her responsibility was to ensure that people without tickets did not enter. She faithfully performed the responsibility given to her and even refused entry to Jawaharlal Nehru. When the organizers of the exhibition saw what she had done and angrily scolded her, she replied that she was only following instructions. She allowed Nehru only after the organizers bought tickets for him. Nehru praised the girl for the courage with which she performed her duty. She was also an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi and propagated his ideas by setting up schools for girls and spreading awareness about khadi.

Indeed, Durgabai Deshmukh was a dynamic and prolific political activist and social reformer whose legacy was commemorated by the government of India by issuing a stamp on her name.



**VIDEOS**

**Durgabai Deshmukh**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52QyXReDPiE> [2:54]

In today's episode, we remember freedom fighter Durgabai Deshmukh, who was born on 15th July, 1909 in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. A public activist for women's emancipation, she founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha in 1937. She was also the founder chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board.

Seeds of social reform were sown early in Durgabai's mind and she became conscious of the injustice suffered by women in all strata. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the social reformer Kandukuri Veeresalingam was a close friend of her grandfather. Durgabai met Mahatma Gandhi, when she was just a 12-year-old.

She had collected money for the nationalist movement along with a few volunteers, and when she came face to face with the Mahatma, she gave her gold bangles as well, on his request. This was a turning point, which further kindled her spirit of selfless service and patriotism. A lawyer by profession, Durgabai fought against the system of child marriage and dowry, and the harassment of widows in the name of custom, although she herself was married at the age of eight.

Durgabai was a persuasive public speaker and was imprisoned during the Salt Satyagraha. She came to understand the pitiable conditions of woman criminals and wished to arrange free legal aid for them. This gave the impetus to the free legal aid centre of the Andhra Mahila Sabha in Hyderabad, particularly to help unlettered women of all classes. Durgabai realised that lack of education impeded women's progress. This impelled her to lay the foundation for adult education programmes, which were taken up by the government of independent India.

A member of the Constituent Assembly, Durgabai played an active role in drafting and enacting the Hindu Code Bill. Her efforts to elevate the status of women were evident in her involvement with parliamentary bills. In 1952, she was appointed a member of the Planning Commission. In 1953, she became the chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. In 1959, the government appointed her chairperson of the National Committee on Education. Durgabai received many accolades, including the UNESCO Peace award, Padma Vibhushan and the Paul G. Hoffman Award. She died on 9th May 1981. AIR News salutes this great Indian.

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**Saga of Freedom Struggle**  
**Remembering Durgabai Deshmukh**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3CH5MMNB98> [4:10]

## Durgabai Deshmukh is ignored in Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/in-other-news/130822/durgabai-deshmukh-ignored-in-azadi-ka-amrit-mahotsav.html>

KAKINADA: Durgabai Deshmukh, the eminent freedom fighter born in Rajamahendravaram and educated in Kakinada, is being ignored by people of both these cities while celebrating the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav. Durgabai is well known for catching the attention of Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 and preventing Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru from entering the venue of Indian National Congress conference without a ticket. She has established nearly 100 organisations in the country, apart from a Hindi Institute in Kakinada.

Veterans recall Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Kakinada in 1920 and delivering his speeches in Hindi. Freedom fighter of AP Venkatappaiah used to translate the Hindi speech into Telugu. During one of the visits, Durgabai wanted to meet Gandhiji and raise issues of Devadasis and other oppressed women. Venkatappaiah put a condition that she first mobilise ₹15,000 and donate the same to Mahatma Gandhi. She mobilised the fund within a week and a surprised Venkatappaiah allowed her to meet Gandhiji for 10 minutes.

Instead, the Mahatma spent two hours inquiring about the oppressed women," wrote Ramalakshmi Arudra. Further, when Durgabai gave Gandhiji the ₹15,000 she had mobilised, the Mahatma asked her to donate her gold bangles too. Durgabai took them off and gave them to Gandhiji without any hesitation. In 1923, when the Indian National Congress conference was held in Kakinada, Durgabai was appointed at the entrance to allow only people who bought a ticket. However, when Nehru arrived at the meeting and started walking in, she stopped him, though other people at the venue tried to restrain her. However, Durgabai remained firm and did not let Nehru get in. Nehru appreciated Durgabai's sincerity and entered

the venue after buying the ticket. These two incidents pushed Durgabai into the limelight.

Incidentally, even though she was a child, her marriage was performed with G. Subba Rao, as was the custom those days. Durgabai persuaded her husband to free her from marriage, as she wanted to participate in the freedom movement and do social service. She even gave her consent for her husband's second marriage and herself arranged that wedding. According to Gandhi Bhavan secretary Y.S.V.S. Murthy, Durgabai established more than 100 organisations, which continue to play a prominent role in the country. She subsequently entered into a civil marriage with C.D. Deshmukh, the first finance minister of India. The bypass road from Kambhalacheruvu to Thadithota in Rajamahendravaram constructed 25 years ago, is named after Durgabai Deshmukh.

There is a statue of her at Kotipalli Bus Stand. Her statue is also there at Gandhinagar Park in Kakinada, where she had prevented Nehru from entering the conference of Congress. Kakinada municipal commissioner K. Ramesh said no programmes have been held for Durgabai by KMC, as the corporation has not received any instructions in this regard from the collector's office.







**Hansa Mehta**  
(03.07.1897 - 04.04.1995)

## **Hansa Mehta**

### **An Early Indian Feminist**

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2022/09/12/hansa-mehta-an-early-indian-feminist/>

*In this post, Niraja Gopal Jayal traces the life of one of India's pioneering feminists Hansa Mehta, whose personal choices as well as contributions to public life - driven as they were by her personal beliefs - blazed a trail for equal rights and opportunities for Indian women in independent India.*

In September 1919, a young Gujarati woman, all of 22, sailed to Britain to study at the [London School of Economics](#). Her name was Hansa Mehta, and she was to become famous as a nationalist leader, an early feminist, and the first woman Vice-Chancellor of a co-educational Indian university.

However, it is in the global history of human rights that Mehta occupies a special place. As India's delegate to the [United Nations Commission on Human Rights](#) from 1947–52, she championed the case for a gender-neutral phrasing of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR). Mehta proposed the name of Eleanor Roosevelt as Chair of the committee that founded the Human Rights Commission and undertook the writing of an International Bill of Rights. The initial wording of Article 1 was 'All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' Roosevelt's biographer [Blanche Wiesen Cook](#) (2006: 558) writes that Hansa Mehta, the only other woman on the Commission, 'significantly transformed the document by her insistence that the words "all men" would in much of the world be taken to exclude women. Hansa Mehta influenced ER in many ways. The commission adopted her inclusive formula "all human beings" during its June 1948 session, and women's equality was forevermore affirmed in UN literature.'

Having fought a lonely but eventually successful battle on this issue, Mehta was characteristically impatient with the time spent by the Committee on 'enunciating high principles and discussing social theories', as noted in her 'Report on the work of the first session of the Commission on Human Rights

13 March 1947' in the National Archives of India. Being of a practical disposition, she was emphatic that a mere declaration would be meaningless unless states' adherence to human rights was monitored through proper supervision and enforcement. This preoccupation with implementation found expression in her radical proposal that *individuals* be given the right to petition the United Nations for the protection of their human rights and freedoms.

### ***Back to India***

Hansa Mehta's contributions to the national movement and to public life in independent India were many and varied, but two aspects of her work can be singled out for particular attention. The first, instantiated but by no means exhausted by her contribution to the UDHR, was her commitment to women's rights; the second was her lifelong passion for education and educational reform.

It is likely that Mehta's advocacy of women's rights and gender equality was sparked during her student days in London, where she met [Sarojini Naidu](#), who drew her into the [Suffragist Movement](#). With Naidu, she travelled to Geneva in June 1920 as a member of a delegation of Indian women — including the mother-daughter duo of Herabai Tata and Mithan Tata, enrolled at the LSE — to attend the [Eighth Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance](#), in which women from 39 nations participated.

In 1923, the intrepid Hansa Mehta travelled alone to the United States. She arrived in New York to find that nobody had come to meet her, and was handed over to a representative of the [Traveller's Aid Society](#) who took her to a [Young Women's Christian Association](#) (YWCA) — an experience that yielded a rapturous account of the activities and scale of the YWCA. In the eight months that followed, Mehta visited many women's colleges in America to carry back ideas for women's education in India, especially in the famously progressive [princely state of Baroda](#) where her father [Sir Manubhai Nandshankar Mehta](#) was the Dewan (Prime Minister). She returned home with stops in Tokyo (where she miraculously survived the [great earthquake of September 1923](#)), Shanghai, Singapore, and Colombo.

In India, Mehta married the London-educated physician [Dr Jivraj Narayan Mehta](#), leading to her ex-communication from her Brahmin community as her husband belonged to the lower [Vaishya](#) caste. This was also the time

that she met M. K. Gandhi, at whose instance she led the Desh Sevika Sangh (lit. 'Nationalist Women-Workers Group'), an organisation fighting colonialism which organised [picketing in Bombay](#) by women, many of whom had never participated in such activities and some of whom were still in *purdah* ([Basu 2018](#)). Organising the picketing of liquor and of shops selling foreign cloth, disobeying police orders and getting arrested, she was imprisoned three times. She was the first woman to be elected to the [Bombay Legislative Council](#) in 1937, and was also appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Health. It is notable that she had refused to seek election on the women's quota, being opposed in principle (like many early Indian feminists) to specially reserved quotas. As President of the [All India Women's Conference](#), she drafted the [Indian Woman's Charter of Rights and Duties](#), demanding equal rights to education, equal pay, equal distribution of property, and equal application of laws of marriage and divorce for women. Mehta was one of only 15 women members of India's [Constituent Assembly](#), where she continued her fierce advocacy of equal rights for women.

Through these years, Mehta's commitment to equal rights for women ran parallel to her passion for education, including and especially for girls/women. As Parliamentary Secretary, she set up schools for vocational, commercial and technical education. She also served as a member of the Senate of the [University of Bombay](#) from 1931–46. In 1964, as Chair of a Committee of the [National Council for Women's Education](#), she challenged the dominant view of differentiated curricula for boys and girls, arguing that there was no such thing as 'female aptitude'. After a stint as Vice-Chancellor of [SNDT Women's University](#) (Bombay) from 1946–48, she was appointed by Jawaharlal Nehru as Vice-Chancellor of the newly established [Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda](#). Between 1949–58, she built a reputed University from what was till then just a collection of disparate colleges, a polytechnic, a music school and a Sanskrit *pathshala* (school) ([Mehta 2002](#)). She established faculties of Social Work and Home Science and, most prominently, a Faculty of Fine Arts that remains one of India's finest. Also at Nehru's request, she accompanied her husband when he was appointed [India's High Commissioner](#) to London in 1963.

The [National Portrait Gallery](#), London has an unusual studio portrait of Hansa Mehta with *two* men: her father and her husband (one of which is the banner image of this blogpost). Both these men, as also [Maharaja Sayaraji Rao III](#) (who had also sponsored Dr B. R. Ambedkar's studies abroad), played a progressive role in her life. Hansa Mehta came from a well-off family that prized academic and literary accomplishments. Her

grandfather [Nandshankar Tuljashankar Mehta](#) was the author of the first Gujarati novel [Karan Ghelo: Gujratno Chella Rajput Raja](#) (1866), tr. *Karan Ghelo: Gujarat's Last Rajput King* (2015); her father Manubhai was a professor of philosophy who later became the Dewan in the princely states of Baroda and Bikaner. Sayaji Rao III was a progressive maharaja, committed to primary education and health, and especially keen on establishing libraries and museums. He personally encouraged Hansa's inter-caste marriage. The cultural and intellectual environment of her birth, as well as the influence of Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu shaped, to a considerable degree, the two passions that defined Hansa Mehta's life and work.

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**[Honours to India's Hansa Mehta](#)**

<https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/honours-to-india-s-hansa-mehta>

Recently, the President of the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) honoured [Hansa Mehta](#) on the **International Day for Women in Diplomacy** (24 June 2024).

- This day honors and acknowledges the contributions and accomplishments of women in the **realm of diplomacy**.

**Hansa Mehta:**

- She was a prominent **Indian scholar, educator, social reformer, writer and diplomat from India**.
- She was born on **3<sup>rd</sup> July 1897** and was a **champion of women's rights**.
- Mehta played a pivotal role in revising the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#) to include **gender-inclusive language**.
  - She successfully changed the phrase, "All men are born free and equal," to "All human beings are born free and equal" in **Article 1** of the **UDHR**.
- As the President of [All India Women's Conference \(AIWC\)](#) in 1946, she led the drafting of the "Indian Women's Charter of Rights", which demanded [gender equality](#), civil rights and **justice for women** in India.



- She was also part of the Constituent Assembly of India, a member of its **Advisory Committee** and sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights.
- She was the only other female delegate, apart from Eleanor Roosevelt to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

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# Dr. Hansa Mehta Memorial Dialogue

[https://pminewyork.gov.in/Memorial\\_Dialogue](https://pminewyork.gov.in/Memorial_Dialogue)

## About the Dialogue

Dr. Hansa Mehta Memorial Dialogue intends to raise awareness among the global community that gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights of women and girls must be a central priority. It will strive to firmly establish that gender equality and the realization of women's and girls' human rights are fundamental for achieving human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development.

## About 2022 edition

While every community has been impacted by the global pandemic and is facing unprecedented challenges, women are bearing an unequal share of the negative economic and social fallout of COVID-19. Statistics indicate that women and girls will constitute more than 50% of the population, which is being pushed into extreme poverty by the pandemic. Women will also bear a disproportionate brunt of job losses as many of sectors of the economy that have been hit hard by COVID-19, such as food service, retail and entertainment, employ more women than men. The above developments threaten to reverse the gains made in the past decades in the realm of economic empowerment of women and gender-inclusive economic growth.

The 2022 dialogue will focus on inclusive and gender-sensitive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be held virtually on March 15, 2022 from 0845-0945 hrs and will feature a keynote speech by H.E Dr.Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala , Director

General of the World Trade Organisation, which would be followed by an interactive conversation moderated by H.E Ambassador Ms. Inga Rhonda King , Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the UN. H.E Mr. Abdulla Shahid , President of the General Assembly open the dialogue with his address.

### About Dr. Hansa Mehta

Dr. Hansa Mehta is a prominent Indian scholar, educator, social reformer and writer. Born on July 3, 1897, Dr. Mehta was a champion of women's rights. As the President of All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1946, she led the drafting of "Indian Women's Charter of Rights", which demanded gender equality, civil rights and justice for women in India. She was also part of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Indian Constitution, a member of its Advisory Committee and sub-Committee on Fundamental Rights. Many provisions of AIWC's Charter formed the basis of gender-neutral provisions in the Indian constitution.

At the international level, Dr. Mehta played a pioneering role in drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). She was the only other female delegate, apart from Eleanor Roosevelt, to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. She is widely credited for successfully arguing against references to "men" as a synonym for humanity, and succeeded in changing the phrase, "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal" in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The introduction of the more inclusive language in UDHR was an important milestone in the fight for women's rights and gender equality.

Kindly visit the Web Link:

[DR. HANSA MEHTA DIALOGUE](#)

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=5214123191966167](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=5214123191966167) [1:1:39]

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**THE MAHARAJA SAYAJIRAO  
UNIVERSITY OF BARODA**

## Origin and History:



The idea of establishing a University at Baroda had engaged the attention of the Government of the former State of Baroda and its educational advisors long before the question of regional universities and decentralization, reorganization and reconditioning of higher education to suit the cultural educational needs of areas had taken root in the country. The concept was first visualized by Dr. Jackson, when, as Principal of the **Baroda College** in the 1908, he advocated the establishment of a Science Institute at Baroda on an improved and independent basis. It was a consistent policy of the Government of Baroda to subject its educational system to periodical inquiries of an exploratory nature by educational

experts of international fame, because of which the first Commission was appointed in 1909. The principal recommendation of that Commission was to expand the activities of the Baroda College by establishing additional chairs in new branches of knowledge. As a result of this policy of chalking out untrodden paths in higher education and thereby evolving a university atmosphere in Baroda, chairs of Comparative Region and Household Science were instituted. Prof. Widgery and Mrs. Strong were appointed to hold these chairs.

In 1916, the educational policy of the State was again reviewed. As a part of this inquiry, one of the members of the Commission, Shri S. V. Mukerjea, prepared minutes of recommendations and in his note, he advocated the establishment of a University at Baroda. In 1919 the matter was brought to the forefront by the appointment of yet another Committee consisting of the late Principal Clarke, Prof. Widgery and Shri N. K. Dixit, the then Educational Commissioner of the State. The Committee drew up an elaborate report in favor of civic University at Baroda. Thereafter, Prof. P. Sheshadri of the Benares Hindu University was requested to lay out a scheme for a University at Baroda. Prof. Widgery also submitted a scheme for a State University on the lines of the smaller German Universities. During this period, Her Highness Shrimant Maharani Chimnabai Saheb, the Maharani Gaekwad of Baroda, offered a princely donation for running a Women's University at Baroda. But as Sir Manubhai Mehta, the then Dewan of Baroda, pointed out in one of his speeches,

**"The time was not ripe then for idea to germinate."**

### The Rules and Regulations:

The university has its origins in the Baroda College, established in 1881 by Baroda State. The main building, which houses the Faculty of Arts, was designed by Robert Fellowes Chisholm in Indo-Saracenic architecture style, in a fusion of Indian and Byzantine arches and domes in brick and polychromed stone. The main dome on the convocation hall was modelled after the great dome of the Gol Gumbaz in Bijapur. Pratap Singh Gaekwad of Baroda (1908-1968) (the last Maharaja of the erstwhile Baroda State) founded **The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda** in 1949 on the wishes of his grandfather, Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III (1863-1939), and settled the **Sir Sayajirao Diamond jubilee and Memorial Trust** , which exists to date, catering to the education and other needs of the people of the former Baroda State.

The development of the University may be divided into two phases:

| Phase     | College Name                                |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1st Phase | Baroda College                              |
| 2nd Phase | The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda |

**Smt. Hansa Mehta, the first vice-Chancellor of the Maharaja Sayajirao University** of Baroda was a freedom fighter, an educator, a writer, a social activist, and a social reformer. The daughter of Shri Manubhai Mehta (the Diwan of Baroda and Bikaner states), Smt. Hansa Mehta did her graduation in Philosophy from Baroda College and studied Journalism and Sociology later from England. Upon her return from England, she served as the President of the 'Bhagini Samaj' and played a crucial role during the campaign against Simon Commission and went to jail twice. She later became a member of the Constituent Assembly, and President of All India Women's Conference. She represented India in the Joint Human Rights Commission and working committee of UNESCO. Her major contribution though, was in the field of education. She was the Vice Chancellor of the SNDT University (1946-48) and the M. S. University of Baroda (1949-1958).



She researched and wrote several books on the problems of women and children. She translated some of the Shakespeare's plays and parts of Valmiki's Ramayana into Gujarati. Many universities conferred upon her the honorary degree of D.Litt. She was also awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 1958. Her firm belief in the link between education and women's social problems led her to emphasize women's education. She advocated Home Science education in India and her efforts led to the formation of the Faculty of Home Science in Baroda and the Lady Irwin College of Home Science in New Delhi. She handpicked people of repute around the country to work in the University and sent them abroad to train them in their fields. She undertook steps to create and organize two new faculties: Fine Arts and Home Science. She was instrumental in starting the post-graduate school of social work.

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## Hansa Jivraj Mehta

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/hansa-jivraj-mehta/>

### Early Life

Hansa Jivraj Mehta was born on 3rd July 1897 in Surat, Gujarat. She studied philosophy at Baroda College and then journalism and sociology in England. In 1920, while in London, Mehta met Sarojini Naidu who would later introduce her to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian women's freedom movement.

Mehta's political career was marked by her 1937 Bombay Legislative Council election win. Having refused to contest from a reserved seat, she took on the elections as a general category candidate. Mehta remained on the council until 1949.

During this time, Mehta became closely involved with the All India Women's Conference and became its president in 1946. During her presidency, she drafted the Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, which demanded gender equality and civil rights for women.

At the same time, in 1946, Mehta served as a member of the United Nations sub-committee on the status of women. She was the vice-chair with Eleanor Roosevelt of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Committee. Further, she became the first female Vice-Chancellor in India with her appointment at SNDT University in Bombay.

## Role in India's Independence Movement

Mehta participated in the non-cooperation and swadeshi movements. Her involvement with India's freedom struggle got her [arrested](#) in 1932.

## Contribution to Constitution Making

Mehta was one of the 15 women framers of the Indian Constitution. She was [elected](#) to the Constituent Assembly from Bombay under a Congress Party ticket. In the Assembly, she strongly argued in favour of women's rights and intervened in debates on uniform civil code and reservation.

## Later Contributions

Mehta was the Indian delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. She played a [significant role](#) in ensuring that [Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights \('UDHR'\)](#) was made inclusive and is credited to changing the phrase "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal". Hansa Mehta and Eleanor Roosevelt ensured marriage equality to women through [Article 16 of UDHR](#).

Later, Mehta [was appointed](#) as the first Vice-Chancellor of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, with the University later naming a library in her honour.

The government awarded her with the Padma Bhushan in 1959. She passed away on 4th April 1995.

### Speeches:

1. Mehta [supported](#) the Objectives Resolution put forward by Jawaharlal Nehru, in particular its call for equality and justice for women.
2. She [expressed](#) her regret that the abolition of purdah could not be included in the Fundamental Rights.
3. The uniform civil code, she [believed](#), was a necessity to "*build up one nation*".

### Resources:

1. [Encyclopaedia of Indian Women through the Ages \(Period of Freedom Struggle\)](#).
2. [Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).
3. ['70 years Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'](#).



# Human Rights Day

## Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-rights-day>



Human rights are under assault [...] This year's theme reminds us that human rights are about building the future — right now [...] We must stand up for all rights — always."

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

Human Rights Day is observed annually around the world on 10 December. It commemorates the anniversary of one of the world's most groundbreaking global pledges: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This landmark document enshrines the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being - regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 and sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected.

As a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations", the UDHR is a global blueprint for international, national, and local laws and policies and a bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

It is available in 577 languages, from Abkhaz to Zulu, making the UDHR the most translated document in the world.

# WOMEN WHO SHAPED THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION

Eleanor Roosevelt's leading role as Chairperson of the drafting committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been well documented. But other women also played essential parts in shaping the document. Some of them, and their contributions to the inclusion of women's rights in the Universal Declaration, are featured here.

## ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



**ELEANOR ROOSEVELT** of the United States holding a poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Lake Success, NY, November 1949.

First lady of the United States of America from 1933 to 1945, Eleanor Roosevelt was appointed, in 1946, as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly by United States President Harry S. Truman. She served as the first Chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights and played an instrumental role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At a time of increasing East-West tensions, Eleanor Roosevelt used her enormous prestige and credibility with both superpowers to steer the drafting process toward its successful completion. In 1968, she was posthumously awarded the United Nations Human Rights Prize.

## HANSA MEHTA

Hansa Mehta of India, the only other female delegate to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1947-48, was a staunch fighter for women's rights in India and abroad. She is widely credited with changing the phrase "All men are born free and equal" to "All human beings are born free and equal" in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.







As a finale to their last meeting at Hunter College, the Sub-commission on the Status of Women hold a press conference in the delegates lounge of the gym building. Left to Right: Angela Jurdak (Lebanon), Fryderyka Kalinowski (Poland), Bodgil Begtrup (Denmark), Minerva Bernardino (Dominican Republic), and **Hansa Mehta (India)**, delegates to the Sub-commission on the Status of Women, New York, May 1946. UN Photo.



## Contribution to Literature

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansa\\_Jivraj\\_Mehta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hansa_Jivraj_Mehta)

**Hansa Mehta** was a dedicated reader of classical Indian literature. As the Vice Chancellor of the MS University Baroda, Hansa Mehta had also taken a keen interest in the preparation and publication of the Critical Edition of the Ramayana on the pattern of the Critical Edition of the Mahabharata edited by the [Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute](#), Pune. She presided over the opening of the Ramayana Department at the Oriental Institute of the University in 1951. In 1954, she inaugurated the collation section for the Ramayana at the institute. Subsequently, when the first edition of the Critical Edition of [The Valmiki Ramayana](#) was published in 1961, it was dedicated to her. Besides the Ramayana, she ensured that MS University Baroda undertook projects to publish other monumental works of classical India.

Mehta wrote several children's books in [Gujarati](#), including *Arunnu Adbhut Swapna* (1934), *Bablana Parakramo* (1929), *Balvartavali* Part 1-2 (1926, 1929). She translated some books of *Valmiki Ramayana*: [Aranyakanda](#), [Balakanda](#) and [Sundarakanda](#). She translated many English stories, including *Gulliver's Travels*. She had also adapted some plays of [Shakespeare](#). Her essays were collected and published as *Ketlak Lekho* (1978).

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### Awards

Hansa Mehta was awarded the [Padma Bhushan](#) in 1959.

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[01] Hansa Mehta | 1st Woman Vice-Chancellor of a Co-Ed. Indian University  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEdMBvdXrFM> [23:13]

Hansa Mehta, an independence activist and a prominent women’s rights activist and she was to become famous as a nationalist leader, an early feminist, and the first woman Vice-Chancellor of a co-educational Indian university.

[02] Hansa Mehta - The Woman behind our National Flag's Presentation | History of Indian National Flag  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmljByeKcXM> [5:14]

[03] Hansa Mehta's Constituent Assembly Speech on 15 Aug 1947  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zEpkIDy4kM> [3:33]

[04] Hansa Mehta Changed Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
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**Kamala Chaudhri**  
(22.02.1908 - 15.10.1970)

## KAMALA CHAUDHRI

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/kamala-chaudhri/>

### Early Life

Kamla Chowdhry was born on 22 February 1908 in Lucknow. She completed the Ratna and Prabhakar examinations in Hindi literature despite objections from her family. Chowdhry produced a range of literary work mostly focussed on the lived experience of Indian women.

She was an active member of the Indian National Congress and an Elected Member of the Provincial Congress Committee and the Provincial Mahila Congress Committee.

Kamla Chowdhry actively worked towards educating girls in villages and backward areas. She encouraged the Khadi and Village industries which she felt had the potential provide employment of young women.

### Role in India's Independence Movement

Chowdhry participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) and was arrested on several occasions.

### Contribution to Constitution Making

She was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) in 1946.

### Later Contributions

She was a Member of the Provisional Parliament (1947 to 1952) and acted as the Senior Vice-Chair of the 54th Indian National Congress Session. She entered the Lok Sabha in 1962 after winning from Hapur District in Uttar Pradesh.

### Key Writings

Some of her famous literary works include *Ankhe Khuli*, *'Suriya'*, *'Swapna'*, *'Sadhana Ka Unmaad'*, *'Unmaad'* (1934), *'Picnic'* (1936), and *'Yatra'* (1947).

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# Kamala Chaudhri

## *Defended the Hindu Code Bill*

<https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/one-of-15-women-in-indias-constituent-assembly-kamala-chaudhri-defended-the-hindu-code-bill/2202073/>



During the Constituent Assembly debates, Kamala was vocal in her support for the Hindu Code Bill and countered passionately those opposed to various parts of the Bill. Praising the Bill and championing women's rights, she said, 'My personal feeling is that this Bill will prove as sort of a panacea for our women community and the progress of our Indian society, and this will go a long way to benefit our womenfolk who are even today being degraded to the lowest ebb.'

In support of the provision to end polygamy in the Bill, Kamala emphasized the mental trauma faced by women whose husbands took more than one wife. She opined, 'It is a great injustice done to woman that the husband is allowed to enter into matrimony once, twice, thrice or even four times in the very life time of the legally wedded wife. For a woman this custom is

horribly painful and demands utmost sympathy... For a woman, no other suffering is more tormenting than the distress of having a co-wife.'

The provision for the right to divorce in the Bill was criticized by various members of the assembly calling it a Western influence that would lead to the breakdown of our society. Kamala's stance on divorce was clear and she addressed their concerns in the following words: 'The people here have come to believe that the right to divorce provided in the Bill would result in the destruction of the structure of our society and our culture would go to dogs. I do not understand how people give rise to such apprehensions and how they resort to such talks.'

Well-versed with the Bill, Kamala added, 'But as far as I have studied this Bill I have not come across anything concerning the dissolution of marriages that can be called an innovation, or anything that has not been allowed and permitted by our sacred texts and holy scriptures.' She backed up her argument by adding, 'All the conditions that have been laid down for the dissolution of marriages, or in what manner the marriages can be dissolved, or for what reasons divorce can be granted. I think all these conditions do exist in our *Shastras*.'

Kamala didn't agree with the anti-Hinduism colour that the Bill was painted in by some members of the assembly, 'Those who oppose this Bill have expressed the opinion that this will prove harmful to our religion as well as culture. This thing does not appeal to me at all. This is another thing that the brain and heart of our countrymen have been framed in such a way that anything said in the name of religion highly appeals to the sentiments of the people.'

On the altar of this very religion – in what manner did we accentuate our communal feelings?’ She added, ‘In the name of this very religion, we have seen the murder of Mahatma Gandhi – the father of the Nation.’

She was speaking about the death of Gandhi, who was murdered on 30 January 1948, by radicals who blamed him for the partition of India and Pakistan. The Hindu Code Bill faced severe opposition on another count – equal inheritance rights for daughters. The provision was dubbed as ‘foreign culture’. According to her, this was not true.

Kamala based her arguments on Indian literature – specifically folk songs performed at weddings since time immemorial. She said, ‘This sentiment finds ample expression in our folksongs which have existed for the last hundreds of years. This sentiment did not get into our folksongs at the time of our mothers and sisters but has been there since the times of our grand and great-grandmothers when there was not even a trace of foreign culture anywhere and when it had not set any kind of seal on our culture.’

She expressly stated that it was an injustice to deny daughters a share of their father’s property. Kamala argued further, ‘I think that the provision relating to the daughter having a share in her father’s property is very much in consonance with the times and compatible with our faith and culture and I hope it will be considered in a very generous spirit. Nature has made a boy and a girl equal in the eyes of their parents.

Then why is it that a boy should have a share in his father’s property but a girl should have none?’ Despite the strong arguments put forth by various members including Kamala, the Hindu Code Bill was shelved, and it took many years for it to see the light of the day yet again. The work she and many other women leaders put into the Bill would benefit Indian women many years later.

Kamala continued to serve as a member of the Provisional Parliament till 1952.<sup>25</sup> After that, she worked for the education of girls in rural areas. She contested the 1962 Lok Sabha elections from Hapur in Uttar Pradesh on a Congress ticket. She secured 81,999 votes and defeated her nearest opponent with a 28,000-vote margin.

In her political career, she focused on making girls and women independent through education and skilling like sewing, weaving, pottery, etc. She also helped women get trainings through village industries so that they could have a source of income.

As seen from her speeches on the Hindu Code Bill, Kamala was a rationalist who had a deep understanding of how patriarchy functions in the society. In an era when any discussion on mental health was unheard of, she used her pen to draw attention to the subject through fictional stories of women who were oppressed and gaslit in marriages. Not just that, Kamala used the floor of the highest law-making body of the country to highlight the mental health trauma and angst of women whose husbands took many wives.

Her knowledge about Indian literature also enriched the law-making process and brought in an interesting perspective to her arguments. Even though her achievements and contributions were remarkable, there isn't much public record available about her body of work.

This excerpt from Angellica Aribam and Akash Satyawali's book, 'The Fifteen: The Lives and Times of Women in India's Constituent Assembly' has been published with permission from Hachette India.

Also, visit the Web Link:

<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://newindiasamachar.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/story/2021/Nov/S202111162877.pdf>  
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# *Kamla Chaudhry*

## Her Family's Loyalty to British Raj

<https://www.shethepeople.tv/politics/kamla-chaudhry-the-celebrated-author-who-defied-her-familys-loyalty-to-british-raj/>

**Kamla Chaudhry was a politician and a short story writer who was also a part of the Indian Constituent Assembly. There are many reasons why you should know this inspiring woman.**

We all know that Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is the 'Father' of the Constitution of India. However, there were many other eminent personalities who contributed to our constitution. Of all the 389 members, only 15 of them were women. Although this inadequate representation fills us with disappointment of women, it is still important to recognise and remember their valuable contribution to the supreme law of India.

**Kamla Chaudhry** was one of those 15 women who were a part of the Constituent Assembly. She was also a talented short story writer and freedom fighter.

Here are 10 things to know about the powerful lady:

1. Kamla Chaudhry was born on February 22, 1908 in Lucknow. Her father was a deputy collector. Kamla's family was very affluent and loyal to the Imperial government.
2. However, maternal grandfather was the commander of Independent Awadh Forces at Lucknow in the first war of Independence 1857.

3. Although she was born rich, it was not easy for her to continue her education.
4. She moved away from her family's loyalty to the British Raj and joined the freedom struggle. Kamla actively took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. She was jailed several times for her participation in the movement for independence.
5. During the movement, she joined Indian National Congress. She was the senior Vice-Chairperson during the fifty-fourth session of the All India Congress Committee.
6. She was an elected member of the Constituent Assembly of India. Later, she served as a member of the Provincial Government of India till 1952. Kamla was also a member of the Uttar Pradesh State Social Welfare Advisory Board.
7. Chaudhry became a member of the third Lok Sabha after winning the 1962 Indian general election from Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, as a candidate of the INC.
8. Kamla was actively involved in working for the upliftment of the masses. She worked for girls education in villages and backward areas and assisted the Khadi and Village Industries.
9. She was an esteemed short story writer. Her distinguished works are *Unmad*, *Picnic*, *Yatra*, *Balpatra*, *Hindi Ki Chuni hui Kahaniyar*, *Prasadi Kamandal*, *Khayyaim Ka Jam*, *Apna Maran Jagat Ke Hansi*, *Chitron main Lorian* and *Gandhi Ban Jaon*. Furthermore, her other interests included painting, poetry and gardening.

10. She was married to J.M. Chaudhry. She had several children including Dr. Ira Saxena, a writer and author.

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Most of the rights that Indian women enjoy today are a result of their visionary thinking, perseverance and advocacy. Unfortunately, their achievements are often attributed to prominent male leaders and their names remain invisible.

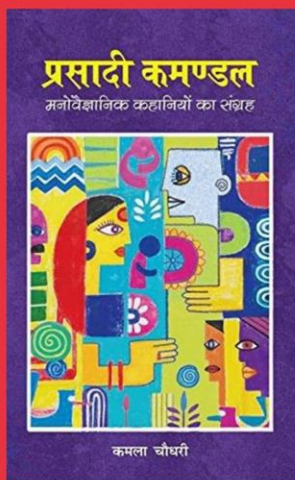
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# Kamla Chaudhry

The Edgy Feminist Writer and Political Activist |  
#IndianWomenInHistory

<https://feminisminindia.com/2019/08/02/kamla-chaudhry-feminist-writer-political-activist/>

Amongst the many forgotten names of women who shaped the history of our country in different ways, is one name that continues to be a mystery - **KAMLA CHAUDHRY**. An accomplished Hindi writer, she also played a crucial part in drafting the Indian constitution in 1948.



# KAMLA CHAUDHRY

THE EDGY FEMINIST WRITER AND  
POLITICAL ACTIVIST

#INDIANWOMENIN**HISTORY**

Indian writing is full of gems with voices that are redolent about our culture, tradition and social practices. Many writers also used their stories to bring about a social reform by making readers aware about prevalent prejudices and how they could transform the society. They not only helped in shaping the society but also played an important role in forming the base for a better future of our country. Flipping through the pages of history one would notice how some extremely significant voices actually got lost into oblivion with passage of time. Amongst the many forgotten names of women who shaped the history of our country in different ways, is one name that continues to be a mystery - **Kamla Chaudhry**. An accomplished Hindi writer, she also played a crucial part in drafting the Indian constitution in 1948. However, apart from few important milestones of her life, nothing much is known about her.

## Early Life and Education

*Kamla Chaudhry* was born in Lucknow, on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1908. Her father, Rai Manmohan Dayal was a deputy collector and a staunch loyalist of the imperial government since last two generations. Having witnessed oppression of the female gender early on, she used all her experiences to form stories later in her life. She was a keen observer, which reflected in her writings and social activities also. The difficulties of life for people around her did not go unnoticed by her. A follower of Gandhiji's principles, she vowed very early in life to abide by his words of wisdom and be the change, she wanted to see in the world. Her reverence for him was also visible in her notable book called '*Gandhi Ban Jau*' (*Loosely Translated: I want to become Gandhi*).

Despite being born in an affluent family, education was a challenge for her. With great difficulty, she managed to clear the Ratna and Prabhakar



examinations in Hindi literature from Punjab University and in May 1923, got married to Dr. J.M.Chaudhry from Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.

### **Writing Journey**

Taking forward her love for Hindi literature, *Kamla Chaudhry* began penning down stories revolving around women and their inner world. Her themes were distinctively feminist and were considered edgy and bold. Many of them depicted the psychological trauma a woman underwent in Indian society during those times. They are clearly reminiscent of the conservative culture prevalent across the different segments of the society and how deeply it impacted a girl child.

Ranging from gender discrimination, widowhood, female desires, exploitation of laborers, impact on mental health of women due to constant suppression to humorous poems, her writings had a remarkable journey. She is also known to have written stories on the emergence of India as a modern nation, post independence, exploring the historical and cultural aspects.

All through her life as a celebrated writer, she published four renowned collections of stories which are a cult till date namely, *Unmaad* (Passion)-1934, *Picnic* -1936, *Yatra* (Journey)-1947 and *Bel Patra* (Leaf Letter) along with from many short stories.

Her writing was poignant and known to articulate deep observations about gender discrimination prevalent in the society. Accompanied with powerful imagery, her stories were touching and often left the reader pondering. They had nothing but the truth reflecting in them. However, due to the sensitivity of the topics, it would have been no surprise to know that her books were not appreciated by masses.

She continued to take forward her passion towards women upliftment beyond her writing by working on various projects for girl child and providing employment opportunities to women as a social activist.

### **Political Career**

Her political career started in 1930, when she broke the family tradition and joined the *Indian National Congress*. Taking an active part in the *Civil Disobedience* movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930, she stayed involved in the freedom struggle undergoing imprisonment by the British many times, till we got Independence in 1947.

Since 1947, as an elected member of the *Constituency Board of India*, she played an important role in drafting the *Constitution of India*, till it was formed in 1950. Post which, till 1952 she served as the member of the *Provincial Government of India*. In the *Fifty-Fourth Session* of the *All India Congress Committee*, she was the Senior Vice-President.



Throughout her political career she continued to grow and serve at different positions across the *District Congress Committee, City Congress Committee* to the *Provincial Mahila Congress Committee* apart from being member of the *Uttar Pradesh State Social Welfare Advisory Board*.

In 1962, she won the general elections from Hapur and became a member of the third Lok Sabha. As a social reformist, a cause very close to heart was the upliftment of women, Kamla Chaudhry actively worked for girls' education in villages and backward areas connecting with various educational institutes in Uttar Pradesh. She also tried promoting livelihood for them by encouraging growth of Khadi and Village industries.

To sum it up, her political career was an amalgamation of her desire to do something for the downtrodden and for women along with her aspiration to serve the nation.

After all these years, Kamla Chaudhry continues to be an inspiration to women across age groups for her sheer grit and determination. She kept striding ahead despite all the challenges life sent her way, and never stopped chasing her goals. The way she used her strengths to turn her weaknesses into strengths is truly admirable. Following her passion and making it the mission, her life was nothing short of extra-ordinary.



**Kindly visit these Web Links:**

<https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2024/11/26/the-founding-mothers-of-the-indian-constitution-the-15-women-that-shaped-the-indian-republic/>

<https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/blogdetail.htm?48>



**Leela Roy**  
(02.10.1904 - 11.06.1970)

## Leela Roy

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/leela-roy/>

### Early Life

Described as a woman of indomitable spirit, Leela Roy was born on 2 October 1900 at Goalpara, Assam. She completed her schooling at Eden High School in Dhaka. Subsequently her academic excellence earned her a scholarship for completing a B.A. in English at Bethune College, Calcutta where she was a recipient of a gold medal. She then graduated with a Master's degree from the University of Dhaka becoming the University's first female graduate. Roy's achievement prompted the University to set up special evening classes for women.

### Role in India's Independence Movement

A staunch feminist, she encouraged and promoted women's participation in social and political movements including the Indian freedom movement. Roy worked towards establishing educational institutions for women. She founded 'Deepali Sangha' in 1923, an organisation that educated and trained women on social and political issues, leadership skills and physical fitness.

She criticised leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi for propagating a limited role for women in public life- restricted to managing domestic responsibilities. She wanted women's role in the freedom movement

to go beyond just the picketing of liquor and other shops, and weaving khadi.

To further encourage women's participation in public life, in 1931 Roy established 'Jayashree' a magazine that functioned as a forum for discussions and debates around nationalism and social issues.

Roy seemed to have engaged with both the revolutionary and moderate stands of India's political landscape. In 1926, she [joined](#) the 'Shree Sangha', a revolutionary organisation led by Hemchandra Ghosh and Anil Roy, The Shree Sangha [operated](#) primarily in Dhaka- it mobilized youth groups and engaged in community service work. The Indian National Congress appeared to have acknowledged Roy's contributions and in 1928 [invited](#) her as a delegate to the Congress Session at Calcutta. At this Session, she [presented](#) a paper on the History of the Women's movement in Bengal.

Inspired by Subhas Chandra Bose, Roy also became a member of the central executive body of the [Forward Bloc](#)- an organisation founded by Bose. Adding another role to her illustrious political career, she took on an [editorial position](#) in the 'Forward Bloc Weekly'.

### Contribution to Constitution Making

She [was](#) elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal on 9 December 1946. However, she resigned a few months later in protest against the partition of India.

### Later Contributions

Roy continued contributing to many social and political causes after she resigned from the Constituent Assembly.

In 1946, Roy helped the [victims](#) of the tragic Kolkata riots and built the National Service Institute for Rescue and Relief Work at Noakhali. She worked ardently for the rights of [refugees](#).



Roy's prolific political career continued into independent India. She became the Chairwoman of the party formed by merging the Forward Bloc and the Praja Socialist Party in 1960. She retired from active politics in 1962.

She passed away on [11 June 1970](#).

### Speech

1. Roy resigned from the Constituent Assembly to protest the partition of India.

### Resources

1. Flaming Leela Roy - Agamoni Lahari Bijoy Kumar Nag Translated by Sumitra Dutta
2. [Jayashree and the Nationalist-Feminist Women](#)

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**Leela Roy**

<https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?1918>



Leela Roy was born on 2 October 1900 at Goalpara district of Assam. Girish Chandra Naag and Kunjalata Naag were her parents. She was academically brilliant. She fought her way to get admission to the University of Dhaka which was meant only for male students and became the first woman to earn a master's degree from the University of Dhaka.

When Leela was just 23 years old, she set up a one-of-a-kind, all-women's group called the *Deepali Sangha*. This Sangha was meant to support women's education so that they would be financially independent. In 1926, she joined *Shree Sangha* led by Anil Roy. *Shree Sangha* was an all-male revolutionary group fighting for India's independence. With her help, many women joined the *Sangha*. Later she set up the *Mahila Atma Raksha Fund*, where women were taught self-defense and martial arts. By 1930, Leela had established herself firmly in India's political landscape when Anil Roy was arrested that year.

Leela was a revolutionary in every sense. Her radical ideas made her a threat to the British. She was arrested in 1931 and spent six years in prison. Later she joined Forward Bloc - a political party founded by Subhas Chandra Bose, after his resignation from the Indian National Congress. When Subhas Chandra Bose was arrested, Leela took over the editorship of the 'Forward Bloc Weekly'. Leela's strong patriotic editorials led to her arrest again. The magazine was forced to shut down and Leela spent another four years in prison. She was released in 1946, along with Anil Roy, her husband.

Leela went to Noakhali in Bengal (now in Bangladesh) and set up relief camps for families affected by the riots. She walked around the region covering over 140 km in six days rescuing hundreds of people.

In 1946 Leela was elected to the Constituent Assembly of India. She was one of the 15 women elected and the only woman to be elected from Bengal.

Leela continued to be part of active politics till 1962. In 1960, she was elected to be the chairperson for the party formed by merging the Forward Bloc and the Praja Socialist Party.

Leela died on 11 June 1970, after a prolonged illness. Her portrait hangs in the central hall of the Parliament.



# Leela Roy

## Freedom Fighter with a difference

<https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/leela-roy-a-freedom-fighter-with-a-difference-1035961.html>

She did not believe in the norms of traditional demarcation of masculine and feminine roles.

Author

Manisha

Pandey

Tiwari

Very few know that Mahatma Gandhi shared his birthday not only with Lal Bahadur Shastri but also with another phenomenal leader and an exceptionally patriotic and non-conformist woman of the country who challenged the set idea of her era that women were best-suited for spinning and weaving khadi and for picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops.

She wanted women's role in the freedom movement to go much beyond that and did not believe in the norms of traditional demarcation of masculine and feminine roles. Her path-breaking ideas and valorous feats were a striking departure from most women leaders of her generation. That flaming woman was Leela Roy, a revolutionary, educationist, social and political activist and more than anything else a woman of an indomitable spirit. Leela was born on October 2, 1900, at Goalpara, Assam. Her family originally hailed from Dacca (Dhaka). She had an extremely brilliant academic career and happened to be the first girl student of Dacca University in her MA class. As the university was not yet co-educational, Leela had to fight her way to get admission. In 1923, young Leela formed an unprecedented women's group in Dacca called 'Deepali Sangh' with multiple branches to

educate and empower women and to make them financially independent. It specifically laid stress on the physical training of women. Rabindranath Tagore once attended a massive all-ladies meeting of 'Deepali Sangha' and said that he had never seen such a large gathering of women in entire Asia.

In 1926 fiery Leela became the first woman to enter the core group of an erstwhile all-male revolutionary party of Dacca — 'Shree Sangha'. Through Leela, a bunch of more women were recruited in 'Shree Sangha', where they were taught to make bombs and handle the arms.

Leela Roy formed 'Deepali Chhatri Sangha', a student revolutionary group and 'Mahila Atma Raksha Fund', one of the first women self-defence martial arts groups. In 1930, after the arrest of Anil Roy, the founder of 'Sree Sangha', Leela took charge of the Sangha and devoted herself completely to the path of revolution.

In 1931, Leela Roy decided to publish a Bengali monthly periodical 'Jayasree', managed wholly by women, an achievement that was inconceivable at that time. She broke the stereotype by keeping 'Jayasree' away from typical housewifely matters like household tips, cooking, sewing, knitting and so on and keeping its focus on socio-political issues. Between 1931 and 1937, she was a prisoner due to her revolutionary ventures. In 1939, Leela and Anil Roy tied the knot. Both of them joined Subhash Chandra Bose's 'Forward Bloc' as its founder-members. In 1940, when Bose was arrested, Leela Roy took over as the editor of 'Forward Bloc Weekly'.

In 1942, during the August movement, Leela Roy was again arrested because of her strong patriotic editorials in 'Jayasree'. When Bose formed Azad Hind Fauj in 1943, Leela was still in jail. He missed Leela Roy's presence at that time in the Far East which he thought would have been beneficial to the 'Rani Jhansi' regiment of young Indian women. By the time Leela Roy was released in 1946, the situation in



the country had become frightful due to the communal riots in Calcutta, Bihar and Noakhali. Leela played an important part at this time in saving lives through the rescue work. During this time, she came in close contact with Mahatma Gandhi and was appreciated by him for her work.

Leela Roy went on to become the only woman from West Bengal to be elected to the Indian Constituent Assembly in December 1946. However, a few months later, the partition of India took place. It was painful and unacceptable for her to see her home and 'karmabhoomi' (Dacca) being taken away from her 'matrubhoomi' (India), hence she resigned the coveted post in protest against it and dedicated herself completely to the relief, rescue and rehabilitation of refugees.

Leela Roy died on February 4, 1968. Her portrait now adorns the wall of the Central Hall of Parliament House. She was a woman who pushed the boundaries of accepted feminism through the kind of life she lived and the works she did. She wanted women to challenge their own capabilities by performing tasks that were generally not considered their domain. Her ideas are of great significance in today's scenario when the much-awaited entry of women into the fighting streams of armed forces is now a reality.

(The writer is a post-doctoral research fellow, UGC)

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Leela Roy along with other founder members of Samaj Sevi Sangha, 1946.

# Leela Roy

## Bengal's Only Woman in The Constituent Assembly

<https://feminisminindia.com/2018/08/14/leela-roy-freedom-fighter/>

Leela Roy prioritised raising women's political awareness and civic skills and encouraged women's participation in every walk of life.

Leela Roy (née Nag) was a great social reformer, a staunch feminist and a social and political activist. She was also a close associate of **Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose**. She was born on the 2nd of October, 1900 in an upper middle class family in Goalpara, Assam, while she was raised in Sylhet, Bengal (now in Bangladesh). Leela was sworn in as a member of the Constituent Assembly from Bengal on 9th December 1946, being the only woman member from Bengal to be elected to the assembly. However, she resigned her post a few months later to protest against the partition of India.

### Early Life and Education

Growing up in Bengal which was one of the centres of political and nationalist movements of that time, Leela Roy managed to carve her own identity in the contemporary freedom struggle. Her formal education led to a BA in English from *Bethune College*, Calcutta, where she received the *Padmabati Gold Medal* for her academic performance. Thereafter, she became the **first woman** to obtain an MA from the *University of Dhaka* in 1923. Leela, along with three other women, joined the Master's course in Bengali and Sanskrit at the University and fought for their right to study in a non-co-educational university. After completing her education, she completely devoted herself to social work.

Leela set up a martial self-defence group for women which was the first of its kind in the region.

### Career And Social Work

As an advocate for women's education, Leela established **Dipali Sangha**, an association for women in December 1923. It was a women's group that encouraged and taught social and political awareness to women, imparting leadership training. Subsequently she founded a school named **Dipali School** and twelve other free primary schools with the help of the *Dipali Sangha*. Later in 1928, she also established two other schools known as *Nari Shiksha Mandir* (Temple of Women's Education) and *Shiksha Bhaban* (House of Education). Besides this, Leela also made an important contribution to Muslim women's education by setting up one of her schools (*Dipali 1*) later as *Qamrunnessa Girls' School* in Dhaka. For the benefit of the female students she also established a women's hostel at Calcutta.

### A Revolutionary in Making

Giving equal importance to women's economic freedom, Leela facilitated women in obtaining vocational training for which she organised **Dipali exhibition**. Her main objective was to defy the established norms of traditional masculine and feminine roles that were all-pervasive during the freedom struggle. Leela took to herself to create a generation of women who would play an active role in politics wholly instead of serving as subservient activists. The *Dipali Sangha* served as a rebellion training institute in this regard. **Pritilata Waddedar**, a well-known revolutionary, took training from this organisation.

In 1926, Leela became the member of a revolutionary group called **Shree Sangha** whose founder was **Anil Roy** whom she would later marry. At that time she was the first female member to enter the core group of an 'all male revolutionary

party'. Leela was successful in attracting women to this group by providing them with choices in their fight for freedom. Women were taught to make bombs, work with arms, and circulate seditious pamphlets. There were other secret revolutionary groups like the *Anushilan Samiti* and *Juguntar* which were primarily male bastions where men were in command. Leela, being a member of both, motivated women to take up secondary roles initially. Subsequently, these women became key players of the missions in Bengal's national freedom movement.

Leela took to herself to create a generation of women who would play an active role in politics wholly instead of serving as subservient activists.

However, women were not limited to these activities but were also given a choice to become part of various social projects like running schools, colleges, and vocational training institutions. In 1927-28, when women became the targets of physical attacks, Leela set up a fund entitled ***Mahila Atmaraksa Fund*** (*Fund for Women's Self-defence*). It was a martial self-defence group, the first of its kind in the region. In addition to this, Leela also established an institution known as *Gana Shiksha Parisad* (Association for Mass Education) for spreading female education at a mass level.

The *Forward Bloc* party, started by Subhash Chandra Bose in 1939 had her as the core member. Bose's confidence in Leela's work and his trust in her organisational capacity pushed her towards assuming greater responsibility within the organisation. In fact, Leela was one of the many people who **strongly believed** that Bose never died in the air crash of 1945.

### Women's Writing and Political Struggle

In 1931, Leela Roy launched *Jayashree Patrika*, a women-centric magazine dedicated and managed wholly by women



and named by **Rabindranath Tagore**. It was founded in the wake of Chittagong armoury raid and the crackdown on press freedom. The motive behind it was to inspire the spirit of patriotism and a fearless desire to serve the country among the women of Bengal. *Jayashree Patrika* went through a tumultuous phase during the independence struggle with its founder being behind bars most of the time. After Leela's release from prison in 1938, the magazine was re-launched. In a bid to encourage women's participation in every walk of life, it sought out women who could express their own views and spread political awareness

**The Social Worker**

In 1941, she **established** the *Unity Board* and the *National Service Brigade* to expand her social and political endeavours. Leela was again arrested in 1942, during the Quit India Movement. Upon her release in 1946, she was **elected** to the Constituent Assembly of India. After the Noakhali riots of 1946 she participated in the relief work of the victims in Noakhali and **set up relief camps** to minimise the horrors of violence. After the Partition of India, she **ran homes in Calcutta** for destitute and abandoned women and tried to help refugees from East Bengal.

**The End of a Leader**

Leela Roy's life continues to be defined by the foundations that she laid for the education and liberation of women. She pushed the boundaries of established gender norms and challenged the very root of gender-based division of work. She prioritised raising women's political awareness and civic skills early in life and questioned the predetermined roles in the freedom struggle. In 1970, Leela passed away leaving behind a much-cherished legacy of women's struggle and emancipation.



# Women Architects of the Indian Republic

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leela\\_Roy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leela_Roy)

## Leela Roy (1900 – 1970)

JULY 22, 2016 ~ PRIYA RAVICHANDRAN

Leela Roy was sworn in as a member of the constituent assembly from Bengal on 9th December 1946. She was the only woman member from Bengal to be elected to the assembly. She resigned her post a few months later to protest against the partition of India.

Leela Roy's fleeting appearance in the constituent assembly was a result of her disagreement with the congress party's acquiescence to the partition plan. A staunch feminist, social activist and political activist, Leela Roy preferred being the driver, and a champion of the kind of social revolution that the constituent assembly would debate and put in writing a full two years later. Her dedication to the cause of women's education & their upliftment, and her extraordinary commitment to the communist cause made her a force to be reckoned with in undivided Bengal. She was associated with Anil Roy & his band of firebrand revolutionists, & played a central role in Subash Chandra Bose's Forward bloc.

Born on the 2nd of October, 1900 in Goalpara, Assam, Leela Roy grew up in a Bengal that was carving its own identity in the national freedom struggle movement. Her formal education led to a BA in English from Bethune college, and an MA from the newly minted Dhaka University. She was the first female student at the university. Leela Roy, along with 3 other women joined the masters course in Bengali and Sanskrit at the university prompting the university authorities to conduct evening classes separately for the women.

Completing her studies at a time when the country was navigating the non-cooperation movement and the satyagraha movement, Leela Roy's biggest challenge was in trying to defy the norms of traditional masculine and feminine roles that had steeped into the conversation surrounding the freedom struggle. S.D Gupta, the author of a paper on the [Nationalist-Feminist movement](#), elaborates on the critical role that Leela Roy played in casting away the notion "that women's role in the struggle against colonial masters had to necessarily be tailored in a way that would complement her roles as 'mistress of the house' and the 'mother of man', for picketing of liquor or foreign cloth shops and for spinning and weaving of khadi\*."

Her [experiences](#) during the flood relief effort she organized in 1922, and her work for women's suffrage through the All Bengal Association convinced her that true emancipation for women could come only through an education that included every aspect of understanding the world, and training their mind and bodies at a level that would equal or surpass men's education.

She started Deepali Sangha in 1923, a women's group that encouraged and taught social, and political awareness to women, alongside leadership training, and physical fitness. Leela Roy's motivation was to create a generation of women who would embrace politics wholly rather than accept roles that reduced them to role models & subservient activists.

Leela Roy was also the first female member to enter the 'core group of an all-male revolutionary party', when she joined Shree Sangha in 1926. She joined the party at the behest of its founder Anil Roy whom she would later marry. Revolutionary groups like the Shree Sangha, and its predecessors the 'Anushilan Samiti' and 'Juguntar' were conceived primarily as all male bastions where men would pledge their lives for violent, nationalist causes. Women started stepping into ancillary roles initially, since they were less likely to attract police [attention](#). They

went on to occupy central roles and be part of integral missions in Bengal's national freedom movement.

Leela Roy's biggest contribution here, was her ability to attract, educate and empower Bengali women from every walk of life, & provide them with choices in their fight for freedom. Women entering [Sree Sangha](#) were taught to make bombs, work with arms & circulate seditious pamphlets. Women were also given a choice to become part of the various social projects run by Deepali Sangha which included running schools, colleges and vocational training institutions.

In 1931, Leela Roy launched Jayashree Patrika, a magazine targeting women, edited and written by women. The magazine was set to tap into a new found nationalist fervour in Bengal that saw the launch of the Calcutta congress by Subash Chandra Bose, the Chittagong armoury raid, crackdown of press freedom, & a new generation of women revolutionists coming into play.

The editorial board of Jayashree [declared](#) that "Women's magazines meant household tips, cooking, sewing, knitting and so on. We wanted to stay away from all that. Ours was an endeavour for Indian independence—a journal through which women could express their own views and spread political awareness. Jayashree created space for many such views to be aired. We at 'Deepali Sangha' always made it a point to take up projects that would require women to come out of their walled existence and participate in public activities." Jayashree, after multiple shutdowns and restarts has been continuously publishing since March 1947.

Leela Roy was one of the key members of the Forward Bloc party, that was started by Subhash Chandra Bose. She and her husband were key in maintaining party unity during Bose's arrest. She was also responsible for the forward bloc weekly during this period. Bose's confidence in Leela Roy's work, and his trust in her organizational capacity pushed her towards assuming greater responsibility within the organization &



at many points Bose's most trusted compatriot. Many of her editorials in the forward bloc weekly take a very scathing view of congress capitulation to British demands. She was severely critical of Congress's acquiescence to the world war and its inability to forcefully, and violently push back against the British. She risked jail, censorship and alienation by more moderate forward bloc members to stand for the values which she believed to be the ones that Bose would stand by. Her exit from the constituent assembly came at a time when the country was still reeling from the horrific violence that was set in motion by the division of the subcontinent. She went on work on ground in [Noakhali](#)<sup>\*\*</sup>. Her organization, the National Services Institute worked at setting up relief camps, rescuing women and aiding refugees in and around a fractured Bengal.

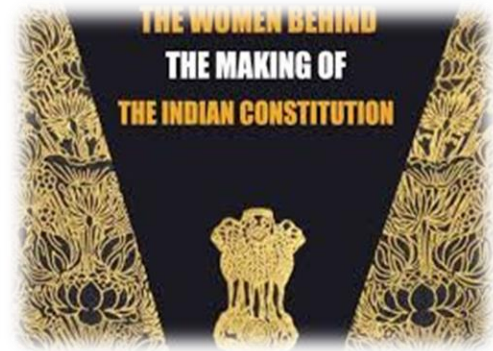
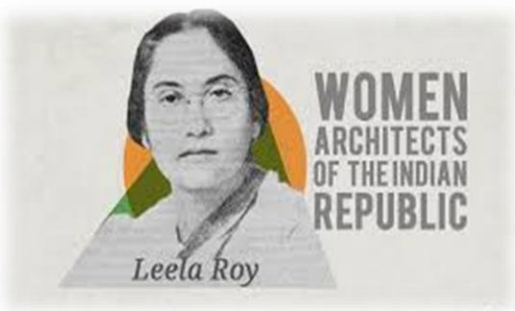
Leela Roy was one of the many people who strongly believed that Bose never died in the air crash of 1945. Her personal correspondence, writings, and the official story of Jayashree remained that Bose came back to India.

Leela Roy's life remains defined by the foundations that she lay for the education of women and for her unparalleled contributions in pushing women to the forefront of the freedom struggle. H.V Kamath, in her obituary [wrote](#) 'her restless dauntless spirit roused the dormant energies of a youthful band of men and women in Bengal ,to whom she imparted her own zeal and spirit of devotion in considerable measure" Her life work pushed the boundaries of accepted feminism, & made significant inroads for women who were not satisfied with fighting for altruistic ideals. The endurance of the institutions she has built both in Bengal and Bangladesh are a testament to her foresight & dedication to see a stronger, more educated generation of women in power.

*\*Jayashree and the Nationalist Feminist Movement. S.D Gupta, Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies Alam-e-Niswan Vol.17, No.1, 2010, pp.71-100, ISSN: 1024-1256. This was one of the most comprehensive papers that I could find on Leela Roy and her work.*

\*\*One narrative suggests that Leela Roy walked 90 miles, to reach Ramganj on the 9th of December 1946, to rescue abducted girls. The narrative is suspect for the simple reason that she was in Delhi, signing the register for the first constituent assembly session. Her name erroneously noted as **Leela Ray** is among the list of members who signed & presented their credentials.

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## Malati Chowdhry

(26.07.1904 - 15.03.1998)



## Malati Choudhury

<https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?297>

Malati Choudhury was born on 26 April 1904 in Patna where her father Kumud Nath Sen, a man from east Bengal who was practicing as a barrister, died when she was only two and a half years old. Malati was reared by her mother Snehlata Sen, who was a writer and a teacher. Her family was rich with politicians but Malati did not choose the path of formal politics. Instead, she decided to work for and with the people.



At the age of 16, she was admitted to ViswaBharati, Santiniketan. Here she was influenced directly by the teachings and principles of Rabindranath Tagore who called her "Minu". Apart from education, she was also learning music and dance. In the process, she acquired knowledge in many performing arts. There she met Nabakrushna Choudhury, the younger son of Gokulanand Choudhury who also came there for education. Both shared each

other's thought processes which made them tie the knot in 1927. They settled in a small village Anakhia, in the Jagatsinghpur district, and started community services.

Since she was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in her school days and married Nabakrushna Choudhury who was also from a family of freedom fighters, she dedicated her entire life to the cause of freedom struggle and service of the people. Her journey started in

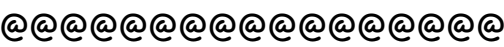
1930 in Inchudi and then at Kujang, where she motivated hundreds of women to leave their houses and join the Salt Satyagraha. She also inspired other women to picket before the shops selling foreign goods and courted arrest.

It was mostly the effort of Malati Devi that kindled the Prajamandal Movement in many states like Dhenkanal, Talcher, Nilgiri, etc. The Dhenkanal peasant movement broke out on 12 September 1938 under her initiative and leadership of Nabakrushna Choudhary at Jenapur. The movement was so powerful that at the first instance fifteen to twenty thousand people gathered against the king. Malati along with her husband became the backbone of the movement and provided a much-needed boost in the time of crisis. Slowly other villages started their own organizations and participated in the movement.

The king tried to pacify the peasants by declaring several commissions but the Prajamandal didn't agree with it. Thereafter the king took repressive steps to suppress the movement which culminated in the killing of Baji Rout and other Prajamandal volunteers. In spite of unleashing a reign of terror by the state police, Malati Debi roamed freely in the villages of Dhenkanal to give moral support and inspiration to the people.

In 1942, she carried Gandhi's message 'Do or die' to the people of Odisha and participated in the Quit India Movement for which she was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment. After her release, she started the construction of 'Baji Rout Hostel' in Angul where she rehabilitated the tribal and orphan children and taught them. In 1946 she joined Mahatma Gandhi's peace mission in Nuakhali and spent there for some time. In 1948, she formed 'Utkal Nabajiban Mandal' for the education of the children of poor and tribal.

She has won many awards in her life for her contribution to society. But she always raised her voice against injustice for which she and her husband were arrested during an emergency in 1975. She died on 15 March 1998.





## CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY MEMBERS

### Malati Choudhury

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/malati-chaudhary/>

#### Early Life

Malati Choudhury was born on 26 July 1904, in Calcutta to a family of politicians. At the age of 16, Choudhury refused to join college and complete her education. Instead, in 1921, she was joined Visva Bharti in Shantiniketan. It was here that her views on patriotism and the freedom movement developed. They were also deeply influenced by Tagore. Choudhury moved to Orissa in 1927 and engaged in grassroots works for underprivileged communities. Choudhury was a Marxist, woman freedom fighter who actively participated in the diverse struggles of oppressed communities in Orissa. She was fondly called Numa by those she inspired.

#### Role in India's Independence Movement

Choudhury played a vital role in India's Independence Movement. She was arrested and imprisoned several times (1921, 1930, 1936, 1942) by the British, for her participation in various freedom movement activities.

In 1933, Choudhury started actively participating in the Congress party. Along with her husband, she organised the Utkal Congress Samajvadi Karmi Sangh, the Orissa branch of the All India Congress Socialist Party. Choudhury founded the Post Basic School at Champatimunda, Orissa. In 1946, she set up the Bajiraut Chhatravas to educate the children of freedom fighters and became the president of the Orissa Pradesh Congress Committee. She had a significant impact on freedom struggle movements organised on the local levels.

In 1934, Malati took part in M.K. Gandhi's padayatra in Orissa. She led the Krisaka Andolan to save farmers from exploitation by landowners and moneylenders. She played a central role in the peasants uprising in Orissa in the 1930s and established the Utkal Provisional Kisan Sabha that worked towards the abolition of the zamindari system.

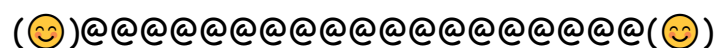
She was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Orissa through a Congress ticket. However, she resigned from the Assembly that very year to work with Gandhi and because she felt 'unfit' for the work. She wanted to continue working on the ground with farmers, Dalits, tribals, and children.

In 1948, Malati and her husband, along with other freedom fighters, formed the Utkal Navjeevan Mandal in Orissa that worked towards rural development and tribal welfare. She was the President of the Orissa Civil Liberties Committee and condemned the killings of Naxalites.

She strongly opposed state action during the emergency of 1975 which led to her imprisonment. She won multiple awards for her work including The National Award for Child Welfare in 1987, Jamnalal Bajaj Award in 1988, Utkal Seva Sammaan in 1994, and The Tagore Literacy Award in 1995.

Malati Choudhury passed away in 1998 at the age of 93.

1. [Malati Devi Choudhury: One Of The First Women Marxist Leaders In India | #IndianWomenInHistory](#) by Kavya (Feminism in India, 2019)
2. [Role of Malati Choudhury and her Associates in Indian National Movement](#) by Janmejaya Choudhury (Odisha Review, 2022)
3. [Malati Devi Choudhury \(1904 - 1998\)](#) by Priya Ravichandran (15fortherepublic, 2016)

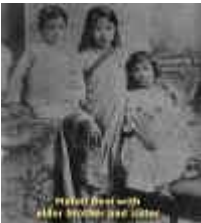


Malatí Chaudhury  
A Biographical Sketch

<https://www.tribaltribune.com/index.php/volume-1/mv1i11/malati-chaudhury-a-biographical-sketch>

No list of women freedom fighters fighting for India's independence would be complete without in it the name of Malati Chaudhury. She was born hundred one

years ago as Malati (Minu) Sen on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1904 in a highly anglicised Bengali family.



Her father Kumudnath Sen was a Barrister and her maternal grandfather Biharilal Gupta was an ICS officer. She was the youngest child of her parents but had lost her father when she was only three years old. Her mother Snehalata who took up the job of a teacher in Bethune College at Kolkata and reared her four children with rare grit and courage. Minu was admitted to Bethune school and impressed her teachers as very good at studies. But the call of Mahatma Gandhi, in 1921, for non-cooperation with British administration was too loud to ignore. Minu decided not to appear in the forthcoming Matriculation examination and escaped to one of her uncle's house.



But strict disciplinarian that her mother Snehalata was, Minu was brought back and was coaxed to appear the examination. She was not prepared for the examination, Minu told her mother. But Snehalata was confident of Minu's ability. She made her to sit in the examination. Minu passed Matriculation in first division. College education was imminent in Bethune College. But Minu stood her ground; she won't continue in the college managed by foreigners. She wrote to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore seeking admission to Shantiniketan. Shantiniketan was set up in the year 1901 by Rabindranath Tagore and had emerged as an institution attracting nationalists for their intellectual stimulation and development. Rabindranath had risen in the esteem of the nationalists for abjuring his knighthood conferred by the British Crown in protest against the 1919 Jaliwanabag massacre. Gurudev agreed to admit Minu provided her mother Snehalata would take charge of the ladies' hostel as the Superintendent. Rabindranath knew Snehalata (affectionately called Lati) as the daughter of his

friend Biharilal. Snehalata gladly accepted the offer and Minu joined Shantiniketan.

In no time she emerged as the leader and became affectionate 'Minu Di' (Minu, the elder sister) for the inmates. These inmates were beholden to her boldness and were convinced that no odd could deter their Minu Di from pursuing her mission. That she was a natural leader was evident in those days according to her contemporary Amita Sen, the mother of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. Her compatriots were convinced that she loved to tread uncharted route.

In Shantiniketan her opposition to British government grew stronger with the approval from the scholars like CF Andrews and other nationalists. At the same time her interest in music and drama was deepening. In Shantiniketan her personality was blooming into a wondrous mixture of restlessness and serenity; restlessness to see India free of British yoke and serenity to plunge into the world of music.



Here she chose her life partner, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, an Oriya youth, and took everybody by surprise. They were married in July 1927 but not without opposition from the conservative mother of Nabakrushna. Nabakrushna, though belonged to a feudal family of Zamindars and was son of a renowned lawyer, he along with elder brother Gopabandhu Chaudhury had by then become active in freedom movement; Gopabandhu Chaudhury had joined freedom movement after resigning from the provincial civil service.



Malati Sen became Malati Chaudhury and began a life consistent with her spirit to tread uncharted route. The couple lived in a village Anakhia, twenty two miles away from Cuttack city, on an ancestral farm of Nabakrushna. In this farm began her active political life. She came in direct contact with the common people and got exposure to the social evil like untouchability prevailing around. A conscious fight against it began with the support of the couple to the consternation of the high caste people of the area. The Chaudhury family which was wholly into the freedom movement provided a unique environment to Malati Devi to give expression, on a wider scale, to the spirit of her rejection of any thing that was foreign. She participated along with other members of the Chaudhury family in protests against the British and was jailed. The British even did not spare her from keeping her separated from her two-year-old first child Uttara (b.1928).



In this farm of Anakhia, she was participating in a political formation which was first of its kind in the then India. Under the leadership of Nabakrushna Chaudhury, the Utkal Congress Socialist Workers League was coming into being (February, 1933) to form a cadre of Congress workers believing in socialism under the Marxian influence. Such formation began in Bombay almost a year after (February 1934) under the leadership of Minoo Masani. Bihar, Punjab and a few other states also witnessed such formations subsequently as the support of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru towards such formation within Congress was becoming clear. On 21 & 22 October 1934, the first convention of All India Congress Socialist Party was held. The Utkal Congress socialist Workers League decided to merge itself in this all India Congress Socialist Party and to work as its provincial unit.

Consistent with the Marxian principle of abolition of private property, Nabakrushna had handed over this ancestral farm to the League and Malati Devi all her ornaments. These ornaments were sold to publish the weekly organ of the League, SARATHI. Every issue of this magazine in its first page carried the historic message WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE. On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1933, the Cuttack City witnessed unfamiliar sight of some people marching with slogan WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE; the May day was being observed.

Malati Devi's involvement with the common man's struggle became deeper. She was in a haste to see the elimination of the sufferings of the people. The condition of farmers had moved her. She along with her husband and colleagues of the League began organising the farmers to raise demands, which if met, they believed, would alleviate their sufferings and end their exploitation. The massive gathering of about fifty five thousand farmers on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1938 in Jenapur of Cuttack district adjacent to Dhenkanal district is remembered as an evidence of Malati Devi's organisational ability. That she could arouse in people the spirit of sacrifice for freedom from the exploitation was convincingly established when fifty thousand strong mob gheraoed the palace of the king of Dhenkanal against his misrule and oppression. The King fled the palace. But the oppression of the King was replaced by British police repression. It, however, did not deter people from continuing their struggle rather such struggles in other princely states looked forward to the guidance of Malati Devi.



Kala Bhavan - Baji Rout Chhatrabas

She had become Joan of Arc in such struggles. Her concern for the children of the oppressed people of the princely states, particularly those of the activists, led her to set up an institution at Angul adjacent to the princely state of Dhenkanal. This institution, which was named as 'Baji Rout Chhatrabas' was formally inaugurated on 11th May 1946 to provide appropriate

education to those children. Such movements in the princely states, ironically, did not have the approval of the Congress Party. But this never prevented Nabakrushna and Malati Chaudhury from guiding such movements, though they belonged to the Party.

She never thought her involvement in politics as a route to occupy some position of power. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly but she resigned to work among the tribals rather than being a mute spectator to the compilation of the Indian Constitution. She was not comfortable with the manner in which the preparation of the Indian Constitution was undertaken. Her aversion to power was such that she preferred escaping to forest than seeing her husband as the Chief Minister. Her politics was to serve the people not from the position of power but by becoming one with them. She strengthened the newly founded institution, the Utkal Nabajeevan Mandal by training activists and persuading them to work amongst the tribals.



With Children and Co-Workers

To instill confidence in the workers, she herself moved from village to village and no mountain or forest, it is said, had remained untreaded by peripatetic Malati Devi. She devoted herself in improving the lot of the tribal people by creating opportunities for their appropriate education and making them conscious to fearlessly fight for their rights. Due to her inspiring leadership, the activists of the Utkal Nabajeevan Mandal could successfully stop various feudal practices in the tribal regions that were highly exploitative in character. They could bring about prohibition amongst tribals. A dreaded disease called YAWS prevalent

amongst the tribals of Gunupur in Koraput district could be completely eradicated due to sincere efforts by these activists.

She stood against every kind of superstitions and never hesitated to make scathing criticism of the government even if her husband Nabakrushna Chaudhury led it. Her daring role in uprooting Nepali Baba in Rantalei of Dhenkanal district in 1950-51 is fondly remembered by all rationalists. She had defied her husband's refrain and took on the Baba with only one of her colleagues beside her as against the presence of Baba's numerous devotees. Her protest was so loud that Baba fled the place.



She never shied away from fighting the mighty. Be it British government or the kings of the princely states or the communal forces or the mighty regime of Indira Gandhi that imposed emergency in 1975, she was consistent in her opposition. She was jailed for her criticism of emergency. It was an irony that Janata Party, a political formation against Indira Gandhi's Congress, accommodated Nandini Satpathy who was the Chief Minister of Orissa during emergency and responsible for the arrest of Chaudhury couple. Nandini was given ticket to contest Orissa assembly seat from Dhenkanal as a Janata Party Candidate. Malati Devi could not swallow this and she decided to contest her, despite her aversion towards power politics, as a mark of protest against such decision of the Janata Party. Expectedly she lost the election but not without exposing the expediency and opportunism ridden contemporary politics.

For her nothing was more sacrosanct than human freedom. Any attempt to curtail human freedom had agitated her. All those who fought against the oppression of common man earned her support. So despite her commitment to non-violence she did not hesitate to support the assassins of a British officer who had unleashed reign of terror in the princely state of Ranpur. Neither she hesitated to go all out to plead clemency for the Naxal leader Nagabhushan Patnaik, who was sentenced to death. Similarly despite her aversion to power politics she contested in the election to prove her protest against unethical and immoral practices in the contemporary politics.



With Naxal Leader  
Nagabhushan

In pursuing her mission of emancipation of common man from various bondage and superstitions and in upholding what is ethical and moral, she always went beyond the constraints of organisation and ideology; as if service to common man was her only ideology and she was steadfast in commitment towards it.



Son Binayak with Parents  
Nabakrushna & Malati Chaudhury

Malati Devi's life spanned almost nine and a half decades. She died on 15th March 1998. A succession of personal tragedies had already numbed her. She had already lost two grandsons in the year 1983, her husband in 1984, and her eldest daughter in 1988. The fortitude with which she could bear the death of her only son Binayak (death 12th March 1948) had naturally weakened. She was becoming lonely and her disillusionment, which had set in long since was growing. In 1971, she scribbled the following in her diary:

Twenty-five years have elapsed (since independence). Every educated Indian must think as to if we have progressed or regressed. Every educated Indian knows that despite the prevailing democracy based on the adult franchise, we have not progressed, rather regressed. Now, therefore, it is the time when we should find ways towards the well being of our country. I am confident that poor, uneducated and hungry men of this country would find such ways. Only when these people, on realising the country's situation, prepare a constitution, we shall get a real constitution



The next twenty-seven years till her death, she could increasingly see wreckage of her dream country strewn all around with imperviousness of the elected government pervading all through.

Honour and award, though, never held any attraction for her, she was honored with Jamanlal Bajaj award for her service to the downtrodden and contributions to the women and child welfare. But she made history by refusing to receive the award from Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India. The Secretary of Jamanlal Bajaj foundation came to Bajorout Chhatrabas and presented her the award in a very simple ceremony. She was bestowed Deshikottam, the highest honour of Viswa Bharati, Shantiniketan, her alma mater on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1998, and only a fortnight before her death.

Both Malati Devi and Nabakrushna Chaudhury had consciously avoided publicity and distanced themselves from any thing that is white collared and elitist. Malati Devi never became part of the power, Nabakrushna Chaudhury, however, became. He was a minister from 1946 to 1948 and then Chief Minister from 1950 to 1956. Yet he goes down in the public memory as the only Chief Minister (till date) to have remained untouched by the arrogance of power and without the trappings of the high office ever flaunted. That Nabakrushna bid adieu to the active politics and engaged himself in constructive work amongst the tribals and downtrodden under the aegis of the Utkal Nabajeevan Mandal is attributed to the influence of Malati Devi. Even Jawaharlal had to grumble against Malati Devi dissuading Nabakrushna from coming into active politics.



They were a rare political couple; the scholarly quietude of Nabakrushna wedded to action packed restlessness of Malati Devi with the singular mission to genuinely empower the poor and down trodden to wrest their claims from the rich and powerful. The problems have not ended. The tribals and downtrodden are still struggling for their existence and remind us the necessity of resurrecting the commitment and boldness of this couple. In contemporary socio-political milieu good examples are under threat of receding from public memory. Not surprisingly, this fate has overtaken the example of Nabakrushna and Malati Chaudhury. This short biographical sketch is an humble attempt to arrest such recession.



Nabakrushna & Malati Devi

**Photographs** : Kasturi Mruga Sama by Manmohan Chaudhury; Numa- A compilation; Smaranika, published by Utkal Navajeevan Mandal; Shradhanjali, published by Bastia Memorial Trust; Adwitiya, published by Nabakrushna Chaudhury Centenary Committee; Ajnanku Abhinandan, published by Banabasi seva Samiti, Baliguda; Ajna by Subhas Chandra Mishra; Pathikrit published by Lohia Academy Trust



### **Malati Choudhury 1904-1998**

Though she was born in a family of politicians, it was during her time at Visva Bharti in Santiniketan that she developed an interest in the freedom movement. Deeply influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi, she dedicated her life to uplift the marginalised in Odisha. She was married to Nabakrushna Choudhury, who served as the state's chief minister. She popularised the Praja Mandal movement in the state.

She quit the Constituent Assembly the year she joined, to work with Gandhi. Marxist in her outlook, she organised several movements for workers and tribals. She was also jailed during the Emergency. Her cousin, Indrajeet Gupta, later became the Union home minister. She was THE WEEK's 'Woman of the Year' in 1990.

## Honours and awards

- [National Award for Child Welfare](#) (1987)
- [Jamnalal Bajaj Award](#) (1988)
- [Utkal Seva Sammaan](#) (1994)
- [Tagore Literacy Award](#) (1995)
- Honour by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the first sitting of the Constituent Assembly (1997)
- Honour by the State Social Welfare Advisory Board (1997)
- Honour by the [Rajya Mahila Commission](#) (1997)
- Deshikottama (D.Litt. Honoris Causa) from Viswa-Bharati
- In 1988, she refused to receive the prestigious Jamnalal Bajaj Award from the hands of the Prime Minister [Rajiv Gandhi](#), because, according to her, Rajiv Gandhi had not done anything to promote Gandhian values.



Gandhiji used to call her "Tofanee"



She was Tagore's favourite "Minu"



**Purnima Banerji**

(1911 - 1951)

## Purnima Banerjee

<https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/district-repository-detail.htm?28747>



**P**urnima Banerjee, a prominent Indian freedom fighter, was a key figure in the individual Satyagraha movement. Active in the late 1930s and 1940s, she was part of a radical network of women in Uttar Pradesh championing the freedom struggle. She joined the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 and served as the secretary for the Indian National Congress' city committee in Allahabad. In 1941, Banerjee, along with Sucheta Kripalani, was arrested for participating in Individual Satyagraha and later for her involvement in the Quit India Movement.

Banerjee, the younger sister of Aruna Asaf Ali, was closely associated with the Nehru family in Allahabad and endured multiple imprisonments during the freedom movement. Recognized for her dedication, she was appointed Secretary of the City Congress Committee, where she worked to unite rural communities with the Congress and raise awareness about independence and fundamental rights. She engaged with farmers and trade unions to rally them in the freedom struggle.



Banerjee served in the Constituent Assembly from 1946 to 1950, representing the United Provinces, and was a member of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly in 1946. Her final speech in the assembly was on 24 November 1949. Notably, she led the chorus in singing "Jana Gana Mana" after its official adoption as the national anthem on 24 January 1950.

Purnima Banerjee passed away in 1951.



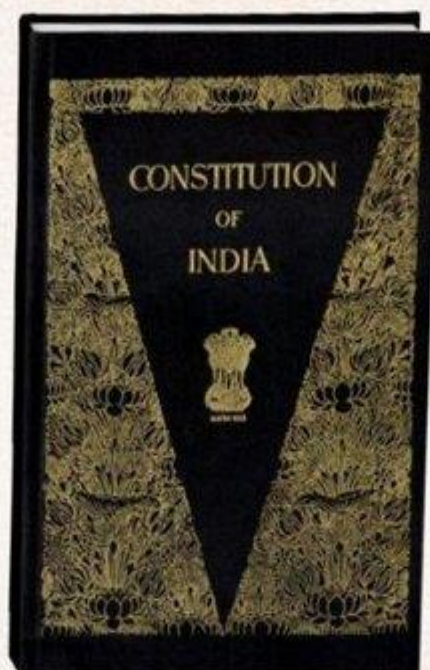
Description plaque displayed in Azad Gallery in Allahabad Museum



Department of  
School Education & Literacy  
Ministry of Education, Govt. of India



# Know Your Constitution



“



Purnima Banerjee was one of the 15 women members of the Constituent Assembly of India. She played a significant role in the debates and discussions that shaped the Indian Constitution, advocating social justice, equality and the rights of women and marginalized communities. She stood at the forefront of the freedom movement in the late 1930-40s.

”



# Purnima Banerji

1911 - 1951

## Role in India's Independence Movement

Purnima Banerji was involved in the freedom struggle along with Sucheta Kripalani, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, and Uma Nehru. She took part in the individual Satyagraha and Quit India movements.

She was a member of the Congress Socialist Party and the Indian National Congress. As a Secretary of the Allahabad City Congress Committee, Banerji worked towards creating rural engagement. She also conducted meetings with kisans and trade unions.

## Contribution to Constitution Making

Banerji was appointed to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces. In the Assembly, she intervened in discussions around the Preamble, preventive detention and qualifications of Rajya Sabha members.

## Speeches:

1. Banerji argued that the preventative detention clause in Draft Article 15A (Article 22 of the Constitution of India) must prescribe time limits beyond which a person cannot be detained. Further, she went on to assert that the detained person, if they are the earning member of their family, must be given maintenance allowance.
2. When the Assembly was discussing the Preamble, Banerji sought to expressly state in the Preamble that 'sovereignty' is derived from the people of India.
3. During the discussion around the qualifications of Rajya Sabha members, Banerji believed that the age limit should be reduced from 35 to 30 years.

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# Inspirational Women

## Purnima Banerjee

<https://aishwaryasandeep.wordpress.com/2021/01/27/iw12/>



The Twelveth Inspirational Woman that we have today is Purnima Banerjee, she was one of the members of the Constituent Assembly, which drafted the Constitution of India.

**Purnima Banerjee** (née **Ganguly**, 1911-1951) was an [Indian freedom fighter](#) and a part of the constituent assembly from 1946-1950.

Secretary of the [Indian National Congress](#) committee in [Allahabad](#), she took part in the [Salt March](#) and the [Quit India Movement](#) and was subsequently imprisoned. Later, she became a member of the [Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly](#) and of the [Constituent Assembly of India](#). She was [Aruna Asaf Ali](#)'s younger sister. As secretary for the city committee, she was responsible for engaging and organizing trade unions, *kisan* meetings and work towards greater rural engagement.



Purnima Banerji became a part of the *Indian National Congress* since its inception in 1934. She was also the secretary for the *Indian National Congress* city committee in Allahabad. As a secretary, she effectively engaged the rural communities, organized trade unions and kisan meetings efficiently. As a socialist herself, her Marxian ideology diversified the culture of *Congress*.

She took part in the 24 days Dandi March in 1930 which was an act of non-violent, civil disobedience in colonial India. In 1941, she, along with Sucheta Kriplani started individual *satyagraha* for which both of them were eventually arrested. Banerji was again arrested in 1942 for taking part in the *Quit India* movement. She had to take her B.A. exams from prison. Neither did she ever shy away from the forefront of the freedom movement even if that meant imprisoning herself repeatedly, nor could anything deter her spirit. She was a staunch feminist in body and soul. However, when we read about *Dandi March* or *Quit India* movement, the texts usually resonate only the contributions of Gandhi or Nehru.

### Some Highlights of the Constitution Debates

1. Banerjee argued that the preventative detention clause in Draft Article 15A (Article 22 of the Constitution of India) must prescribe time limits beyond which a person cannot be detained. Further, she went on to assert that the detained person, if they are the earning member of their family, must be given maintenance allowance.
2. When the Assembly was discussing the Preamble, Banerjee sought to expressly state in the Preamble that 'sovereignty' is derived from the people of India.
3. During the discussion around the qualifications of Rajya Sabha members, Banerjee believed that the age limit should be reduced from 35 to 30 years.

She represented the *United Provinces* in the assembly. Let's have a look at some of the remarkably progressive amendments she had proposed in the *Rajya Sabha* during her tenure.

She wished to add a new paragraph in Article 16:

*'All religious education given in educational institutions receiving Statewide will be in the nature of the elementary philosophy of comparative religions calculated to broaden the pupils' mind rather than such as will foster sectarian exclusiveness.'*

State's control over religious instruction in schools has never been more relevant than in the present times. She also felt strongly that along with education, right to livelihood and right to earning of honourable bread, must be made part of the fundamental rights. The ideal of common good must always prevail over a country's profit.

Her amendment to Article 18 (2) read,

*'That after the word 'State', the words 'and State-aided' be inserted.'* This was extremely important to extend the protection to minorities against discrimination in public funded educational institutions. She also agreed with the amendment proposed by her friend Mr. Shibban Lal Saksena which stated that instead of imposing a minimum tax limit on everyone, tax should be calculated with respect to an individual's income and family condition.

She pleaded to extend the provision to women, which formerly stated that casual vacancies with respect to minority communities like Sikh or Muslim are filled with members only of those communities. Since women were a minority in politics, they clearly needed reservation to represent themselves. She defied many male chauvinists to establish the fact that women's role in politics is indispensable. Nobody could have described the plight of women in such a vivid way. When we look at the gender

disparity in the *Parliamentary Cabinet* today, we sure know why she pointed this out decades ago.

Purnima Banerji believed that ultimate sovereignty lies with people. She also wanted to drop the word "sovereign" from the *Preamble*. She believed that just by giving the public the right to vote in every 5 years, it's not appropriate to use the word sovereign. When we compare today's politicians treating the public as vote banks and later forgetting all their promises after getting elected, we can see the relevance of her concerns. At the same time, she truly believed that it is the common masses who vest power in the positions elected.

Even when Purnima Banerji stood up in support of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to pass the Draft Constitution, she was never hesitant to express her apprehensions. According to her, the *Constitution* only provided the basic means for a just and civil society. However, it is always dependent on people of power to scale our society to new heights of glory.

Banerji felt that the key industries and mineral resources of the country should have been taken over from private enterprises in order to save the government from foreign aggression. Keeping in mind, India's tryst with salt, salt should have been kept duty free as a gift to free India. Her biggest disappointment with the constitution was the restrictions that it had put on the fundamental rights of speech and of meeting and forming associations.

She was the first woman to lead the chorus of *Jana Gana Mana* after it was officially adopted as our National Anthem on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1950.



# Women Architects of the Indian Republic

<https://15fortherepublic.wordpress.com/2016/04/01/purnima-banerji-1911-1951/>

## Purnima Banerji (1911 – 1951)

Purnima Banerji\* was a part of the constituent assembly from 1946 – 1950. She represented the United Provinces in the assembly. She was serving as a member of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly in 1946. Apart from her many debates in the assembly, she also led the chorus in singing *Jana Gana Mana* after its **official adoption** as the national anthem on January 24th, 1950.

Purnima Banerji was one among a radical network of women from Uttar Pradesh who stood at the forefront of the freedom movement in late 1930's and 40's. Her colleagues included Sucheta Kripalani, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Uma Nehru, Rameshwari Nehru, Hajra Begum and many more. She was a member of the Congress Socialist Party since its inception in 1934, and a secretary for the Indian National Congress' city committee in Allahabad. In 1941, she and Sucheta Kripalani were arrested for offering Individual Satyagraha. She was later arrested again for her participation in the Quit India Movement. She is said to have pursued her **B.A in prison\*\***. She was a close friend of the Nehru family, often sharing jail space with Nehru's sisters, nieces, and with Indira Gandhi. Purnima Banerji was also the younger sister of freedom fighter Aruna Asaf Ali.

One of the more striking aspects of Purnima Banerji's speeches in the constituent assembly was her steadfast commitment to a socialist ideology. She was 22 when Gandhi withdrew the civil disobedience movement in 1933. The **Patel-Bose manifesto** declared that Gandhi as a political leader had failed and called for a radical reorganization of the party, leading to greater acceptance of socialist ideologies and methods. Purnima Banerji's political ideals are likely to have been shaped by the same forces that prodded the congress to acquire more diverse identities. Socialism, and communism became more mainstream, and official. This period also coincided with the introduction of voting rights for women in many provinces. The limited suffrage brought in greater awareness of political rights, and also pushed more women to contest for elections.



Purnima Banerji in her capacity as secretary for the city committee was responsible for engaging and organizing trade unions, *Kisan* meetings, and work towards greater rural engagement. She remained Gandhian in spirit, and Marxian in deeds—a duality that did not seem very strange or isolating in 1940's India.

Purnima Banerji's belief that education, and "right of livelihood and right of earning honorable bread" should be a part of the fundamental rights of the constitution accounted for many of her early speeches in the assembly. One specific instance of her requisitioning for greater government oversight was during the discussion on the fundamental rights on religious instructions in publicly funded schools. She wanted the addition of a new paragraph that would ensure that "All religious education given in educational institutions receiving statewide will be in the nature of the elementary philosophy of comparative religions calculated to broaden the pupils' mind rather than such as will foster sectarian exclusiveness." She debated that it was the government's responsibility to ensure that through an approved syllabus, proper appreciation of all religions is inculcated into students for the sake of unity of the country. She also wanted an amendment to another clause in a justiciable fundamental right that called all state institutions to not discriminate against minorities seeking admissions. She wanted the words 'state-aided' to be added. Purnima Banerji's arguments in these sessions and K.M. Munshi's rebuttal would later be cited by the [supreme court](#) in the T.M.A. Pai foundation case in 2002. Purnima Banerji's debates in the constituent assembly extended to the composition of members of the upper house. She was particular that an upper house whose composition would be determined by a parliament would be unwelcome. She wanted some assurance that "it will not be a House of vested interests or of people with large properties who would stay any legislation which is necessary in the interests of the country." She also moved an amendment that would bring down the qualifying age for the upper house, from thirty-five to thirty.

Her more significant argument came during the debate on Article 22 of the preventive detention clause in the constitution. Purnima Banerji agreed with many of her colleagues that while "any form of detention of persons without trial is obnoxious to the whole idea of democracy and to our whole way of thinking", it would be necessary for a government to have that provision to defend itself. Her amendments to the originally proposed Article 15A asked for a specific time frame by which the detained person should be read their charges, in person appearance by the detainee in front of an advisory board and a maintenance allowance for the

person detained, if they are the earning member in the family. The last of the amendments was negatived by Ambedkar who maintained that "If a man is really digging into the foundations of the State and if he is arrested for that, he may have the right to be fed when he is in prison; but he has very little right to ask for maintenance. However, ex gratia, Parliament and the Legislature may make provision. I think such a provision is possible under any Act that Parliament may make under clause (4)."

Purnima Banerji on October 19th, 1949 stood up to make a case for returning women to seats vacated by women in the parliament. She acknowledged that she was exhibiting a spirit of diffidence and was opening herself up for ridicule in asking that the clause which allowed casual vacancies in the parliament to be filled by persons belonging to the same community/religion also be extended to women. She wanted to "make it quite clear that women do not want any reserved seats for themselves, but nevertheless, I suggest to the House that in respect of the number of women who are now occupying seats in the Assembly, if any of them should vacate their seats they should be filled up by women themselves." Her request came at a time when three seats in the constituent assembly had been vacated by women - Malati Choudhury, Sarojini Naidu who had died earlier that year, and Vijaylakshmi Pandit who had joined the UN. Banerji felt "that not only is the association of women in the field of politics essential but it is indispensable, and therefore I feel that this indispensable section of the people should be amply represented in this House" What was notable about this amendment was the response of her colleagues.

Shri H.V Kamath,a member from C.P and Berar countered her argument for more women to serve in government by pointing out that "regards the capability of women for government and administration is that woman is ruled more by the heart than by the head, and where the affairs of Government are concerned, where we have to be cold and calculating in dealing with various kinds of men, women would find it rather awkward and difficult to deal with such persons and that the head may not play the part that it must play in the affairs of government. If the heart were to rule and the head to take a secondary place then it is felt by many thinking men, and thinking women too, that the affairs of government might go somewhat awry, might not fare as well as we might want them to be." Ambedkar in all his wisdom, rejected her argument.

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| Purnima Banerjee |                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Born             | Purnima Ganguly                                                                                                                 |
|                  | 1911<br>Kalka, Punjab                                                                                                           |
| Died             | 1951<br><a href="#">Nainital</a> , India                                                                                        |
| Nationality      | <a href="#">Indian</a>                                                                                                          |
| Occupation(s)    | <a href="#">Indian independence activist</a> , member of the <a href="#">Constituent Assembly of India</a>                      |
| Political party  | <a href="#">Indian National Congress</a>                                                                                        |
| Relatives        | <a href="#">Aruna Asaf Ali</a> (sister)<br><a href="#">Dhirendranath Ganguly</a> (uncle)<br>Trailokyanath Sanyal (grand-father) |

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purnima\\_Banerjee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purnima_Banerjee)

**Purnima Banerjee** (née **Ganguly**, 1911-1951) was an **Indian anti-colonial nationalist** and a member of the **Constituent Assembly of India** from 1946 to 1950.

**Early life and career**

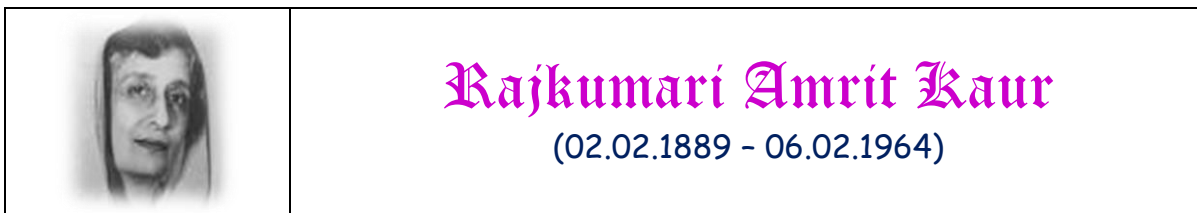
She was the younger sister of independence activist and educator **Aruna Asaf Ali**. Their father **Upendranath Ganguly** was a restaurant owner who hailed from **Barisal district** of Eastern **Bengal** (now **Bangladesh**) but settled in **United Provinces**. Her mother **Ambalika Devi** was the daughter of **Brahmo** scholar **Trailokyanath Sanyal** who wrote many **Brahmo** hymns. **Upendranath Ganguly's** younger brother **Dhirendranath Ganguly** (DG) was one of the earliest film directors. Another brother, **Nagendranath**, was a university professor who married **Rabindranath Tagore's** only surviving daughter **Mira Devi**.

As secretary of the **Indian National Congress** committee in **Allahabad**, she was responsible for engaging and organizing trade unions, *kisan* meetings and work towards greater rural engagement. She took part in the **Salt March** and the **Quit India Movement** and was subsequently imprisoned. Later, she became a member of the **Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly** and of the **Constituent Assembly of India**.

**Death**

Suffering from ill-health, she died prematurely in **Nainital** in 1951, a few years after the independence of India.





## BIOGRAPHY

### Early Life:

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was [born](#) on 2 February 1889 in Lucknow into Punjab's Kapurthala Royal family. Her father, Raja Harnam Singh, had [converted](#) to Christianity as a young boy and subsequently, kept himself out of the line of successors to the throne. In Lucknow, Kaur, the only daughter among 7 children grew up with her siblings on Christian teachings. After an initial period of home-schooling, she was sent to Sherborne School in Dorsetshire, England to complete her school education. She continued her stay in England, graduating with a remarkable academic and extra-curricular record from the University of Oxford.

Once she completed her education, Kaur returned to India aged 20. By 1919, Kaur had begun to grow closer to Gandhi and his teachings. Though she held a deep will to join his ashram, she was initially [denied](#) permission by Gandhi as he felt she was still attached to her material life and that her parents were not too inclined to her joining the Ashram. So, in the initial years after her return, Kaur [committed](#) most of her energy to social causes concerning women such as abolishing the practice of purdah, child marriage and the Devadasi tradition. By 1927 she had co-founded the [All-India Woman's Conference](#), serving as its secretary in 1930 and president in 1933. Finally in 1934 she was able to join Gandhi's [Sewagram Ashram](#), where she remained his secretary for sixteen years.

### Role in India's Independence Movement:

Kaur developed her inclination to politics during the time she spent with her father, who had close associations with many Congress party veterans such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale. By the 1930s Kaur had ventured into the Indian freedom struggle. She strongly criticized Ramsay MacDonald's 1932 communal award which presented separate electorates to several minority communities and oppressed castes. At the 1932 All-India Women's Conference, she moved a resolution to register their opposition to the award for 'touching the womanhood of India' and to unitedly push for joint electorates.

For her participation in various Indian freedom movements, Kaur was imprisoned by the British on multiple occasions. During the Salt Satyagraha, she was arrested for her involvement from Bombay. In 1937, she went to jail again – this time on charges of sedition. Kaur returned to jail in 1942 for taking part in the Quit India movement. The



brutal lathi charge she went through during the process took a toll on her health. Eventually, she was brought out of jail and put on house arrest in Shimla.

Through most of her life, Kaur remained a staunch Gandhian, espousing Gandhian values such as the wearing of Khadi and leading a simple life within Sewagram Ashram.

### **Contribution to Constitution Making:**

She was [elected](#) to the Constituent Assembly from the Central Provinces and Berar province on a Congress ticket. Though Kaur did not speak much during the Constituent Assembly proceedings, she was a member of important [sub-committees](#) in the Assembly and was instrumental in shaping many constitutional provisions.

She was a prominent member of the Assembly's Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee and the Minorities Sub-Committee. Within the sub-committee, she expressed her opposition to the inclusion of freedom to practice religion as this could give constitutional protection to various discriminatory practices such as purdah, sati, devadasi system etc. Her protest was effective as the condition that freedom to practice would not restrict the State from making laws for social reform eventually found its way into the Constitution. Kaur also voted in favour of the State framing a Uniform Civil Code. Though the provision was voted out, it was included in the non-justiciable Directive Principles of the State Policy.

### **Later Contributions:**

In 1947 she [became](#) independent India's first Health Minister when she joined Prime Minister [Jawaharlal Nehru's](#) interim cabinet and served in that capacity for ten years. She was also the first woman member of the post-independence cabinet. In 1956 she introduced the AIIMS Bill in Parliament, making way for the establishment of the [All-India Institute of Medical Sciences \(AIIMS\)](#) to raise the level of medical education within the country. She was also a strong advocate of the nursing profession, pushing for the setting up of many nursing training centres.

Education and health remained the main focus of her work for the next several years. She was the Deputy Leader of the Indian delegation to [UNESCO](#) in 1945 and 1946. In 1950, she became the first female and first Asian president of the World Health Assembly, and also led India's delegation to the [World Health Organization](#) several times between 1948 and 1953. She was also a founder-member and Chairperson of the [Indian Red Cross Society](#) and in 1957 was honoured by the League of Red Cross Societies with the Court Bernadotte Gold Medal for her long and dedicated service in the field. She later became the vice-president of the International Red Cross Society. She also held the post of President at the Indian Leprosy Association and the Tuberculosis Association.

She firmly believed in the idea of free education for all, particularly working for the cause of women's education. She was among the Board of Trustees of the Nankana

Sahib Education Trust and the Hindustani Talimi Sangh. She was one of the founder members of Delhi's [Lady Irwin College](#). Her work towards welfare of children led to the founding of the [Indian Council of Child Welfare](#), serving as its first President from 1948 to 1958. In 1956 Princeton University [conferred](#) her with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

Kaur [passed away](#) on 6 February 1964 at the age of 75 in New Delhi.

### Key Writings:

Kaur wrote extensively on women and issues concerning them. Some of these are [Woman in India](#) (1935), [Challenge to Women](#) (1946), [To women](#) (1948) etc. She wrote [Gandhi and Women](#) as an engagement with Gandhian principles, particularly concerning the question of women.

### Resources:

1. [Letters to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur](#) by Mahatma Gandhi (Navajivan Publishing House, 1961)
2. [Eminent Parliamentarians Monograph Series: Rajkumari Amrit Kaur](#) (Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1992)
3. [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 75, Dies; India's First Minister of Health; Gandhi's Secretary 17 Years, a Princess, Led Campaign to Eradicate Malaria](#) (New York Times, 1964)
4. [Amrit Kaur: The princess turned Gandhian who fought Nehru on women's political participation](#) by Adrija Roychowdhury (The Indian Express, 2018)
5. [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the princess who was Gandhi's secretary & India's first health minister](#) by Deeksha Bhardwaj (The Print, 2019)
6. [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: The princess who built AIIMS](#) by Adrija Roychowdhury (The Indian Express, 2020)
7. [Who was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, named in TIME's magazine list of 100 influential women?](#) (The Indian Express, 2020)
8. [Preserving Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's Legacy](#) (Live History India, 2020)
9. [Makers of Indian Constitution: Rajkumari Amrit Kaur](#) (Sansad TV, 2021)
10. [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: India's First Health Minister](#) (Feminism in India, 2021)
11. [Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Vellalore Annaswamy Sundaram, The Journey of Freedom Movement with All India Radio, Birth of a Nation, Episode #168](#) (Akashvani AIR, 2022)





[HTTPS://TIME.COM/5793532/AMRIT-KAUR-100-WOMEN-OF-THE-YEAR/](https://time.com/5793532/amrit-kaur-100-women-of-the-year/)

**BY TIME STAFF**

**MARCH 5, 2020 6:35 AM EST**

In 1918, a young princess returned to India from studying at Oxford and became fascinated by Mohandas Gandhi's teachings. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, born into the royal family of Kapurthala and educated in Edwardian England, decided her life's mission was to help India break free from its colonial ties and oppressive societal norms. Before long, she was tackling social issues, pushing for women's education and the right to vote and to divorce, and speaking out against child marriage. She became a secretary to Gandhi in 1930.

When India finally won independence from British rule in 1947, Kaur became the first woman to join the Cabinet, serving as Health Minister for 10 years. In that position, she founded the Indian Council for Child Welfare; helped establish the country's top hospital and medical college; and campaigned to prevent malaria, likely saving hundreds of thousands of lives. Awarded an honorary degree from Princeton in 1956, Kaur was praised for offering "substantial and highly effective programs of action" to mothers and children, to the sick and starving.

In leaving her life of luxury, Kaur not only helped build lasting democratic institutions, she also inspired generations to fight for the marginalized. —Naina Bajekal

*This article is part of 100 Women of the Year, TIME's list of the most influential women of the past century. Read more about the project, explore the 100 covers and sign up for our Inside TIME newsletter for more.*

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## Rajkumari Amrit Kaur

### The princess who built AIIMS

<https://indianexpress.com/article/research/rajkumari-amrit-kaur-the-princess-who-built-aiims-6570937/>

In the past couple of years, as India has been battling a global pandemic, the role of the country's apex medical body has come under discussion on several occasions. Significantly, it is the first prime minister of the country, Jawaharlal Nehru, who is credited for the heights reached by AIIMS. It is true that AIIMS came to be under the Nehru government. However, the real driving force behind it was Kaur.

On February 18, 1956, the then minister of health, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, introduced a new bill in the Lok Sabha. She had no speech prepared. But she spoke from her heart. "It has been one of my cherished dreams that for post graduate study and for the maintenance of high standards of medical education in our country, we should have an institute of this nature which would enable our young men and women to have their post graduate education in their own country," she said.





## AIIMS DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS



*Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*  
Founder of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences

By  
**V. Srinivas**  
Deputy Director Administration  
AIIMS, New Delhi

## AIIMS DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS RAJ KUMARI AMRIT KAUR

V. Srinivas<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

1. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur<sup>2</sup> became the First President of AIIMS at the age of 67, a position she held from 1957 till her demise in 1964. In the Diamond Jubilee Year of AIIMS, this essay seeks to capture her legendary contribution to the governance and institution building at AIIMS. The Princess of Kapurthala had her early education in Sherborne School for Girls in Dorset, England and her College education at Oxford University. She was awarded the Doctor of Laws by Princeton University in 1956. She was raised a Christian.



She joined the Mahatma's Ashram in 1934 and served as his Secretary for 16 years. She spent 3 years in prison for participating in the Quit India movement. She became the first woman to hold a Cabinet rank in Nehru's Cabinet and the President of the World Health Assembly in 1950. It can be said that without her visionary leadership, AIIMS would not have reached the heights of excellence that it has scaled over the past 6 decades to emerge as the premier Medical Sciences University of India.



2. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur chaired the first meeting of the Governing Body in 1957. In her eight-year tenure, she chaired 25 Governing Body Meetings<sup>3</sup>. Dr Jivraj Mehta the Director General Health Services and Dr. B.B.Dixit Director AIIMS served with her for the entire period. She got an IAS officer as Deputy Director Administration a 12 year tenure to ensure stability in the process of Institution Building. The 1<sup>st</sup> Governing Body meeting underscored the massive governance challenge before the AIIMS administration of establishing the Institute as an apex medical sciences University with tight budgets, lack of adequate personnel, absence of infrastructure and dependency on foreign funding. It set the foundations for a governance structure where high level policy support and interventions for the Institute's growth were available as the President AIIMS took upon herself the responsibility of coordination with the Health Ministers of State Governments<sup>4</sup>, coordination with Union of India for additional budgetary allocations and for delegation of adequate administrative and financial powers to Director AIIMS<sup>5</sup>.

### The 1st Governing Body

3. The first Governing Body meeting of AIIMS was convened on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1957. The Governing Body members who attended the meeting included Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in the chair, Dr. A.L.Mudaliar, Dr. Jivraj Mehta, Lt. Col Jaswant Singh Director General Health Services, Lt Col Amir Chand, Dr. R.M.Kasliwal and Dr B.B.Dixit Director AIIMS. The Union Health Secretary was not a member of the Governing Body although the Joint Secretary Ministry of Finance was a member of the Governing Body.

4. The Budget for the year 1957-58 was Rs. 40 lacs and the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> Five Year Plan allocation for AIIMS was Rs. 11.11 crores. As the budget was not adequate for the construction of the hospital building upto the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five Year Plan period, the Governing Body decided to approach the Government of India to transfer the Safdarjang hospital to the Institute. The Institute also accepted donations from the Rockefeller Foundation for a grant of USD 200,000 for purchase of books and publications and scientific equipment. Amongst the important decisions of the Governing Body was to consider and adopt the Regulations of AIIMS.

5. The Governing Body considered the half yearly progress report of AIIMS and rated the performance of the Institute "Very Good", despite the insufficient staff. The Director was mandated to identify suitable candidates for the posts of Professor of General Surgery, Head of Department of Medicine, Head of Department of Preventive & Social Medicine and Professor of Anesthesiology. The services of Prof H.M.Smetana were made

<sup>1</sup> V.Srinivas is an IAS officer of 1989 batch of Rajasthan Cadre, presently serving as Deputy Director Administration AIIMS

<sup>2</sup> Rajkumari Amri Kaur lived from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1889 to 6<sup>th</sup> February 1964

<sup>3</sup> Rajkumari Amrit Kaur chaired 25 meetings of the Governing Body: 1957 - 3, 1958 - 3, 1959- 5, 1960 - 3, 1961 - 3, 1962 - 2, 1963 - 4, 1964 - 2

<sup>4</sup> Rajkumari Amrit Kaur coordinated with Health Ministers of UP and Bombay for faculty deputation

<sup>5</sup> Rajkumari Amrit Kaur coordinated with Prime Minister for adequate budgets to AIIMS

## AIIMS DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS RAJ KUMARI AMRIT KAUR

available by the Delhi University for the post of Professor of Preventive and Social Medicine, which was sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation. However obtaining services of Dr. P.N. Wahi for the post of Head of Department of Pathology from the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the services of Dr. Srivastava and Dr. Balakrishnan for the posts of Professors of Medicine from the Government of Bombay was not possible. The State Governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bombay insisted on their prior resignation and Institute could not protect their past services. So tight was the budgetary allocation that the Institute accepted the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation for air conditioning of the Institute building as it was felt that constructing the building without air conditioning was impossible.

### Other Important Decisions:

#### The Selections of Dr. K.L.Wig and Dr. Sujoy B Roy

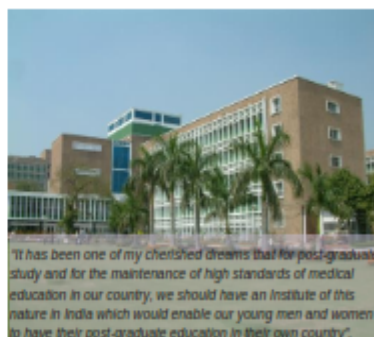
6. In end 1957, the Governing Body decided that the Institute will award an M.Ch for Surgical subjects and DM for clinical subjects<sup>6</sup> in subjects like orthopedic surgery, neuro surgery, thoracic surgery, cardiology, neurology as well as DM in midwifery and M.Ch in Gynecology. It was in this meeting that Lt Col Amir Chand suggested that Dr. K.L.Wig Principal Medical College of Amritsar would be a suitable candidate for the post of Head of Department of Medicine. The Governing Body agreed that Dr. K.L.Wig would be a suitable candidate for the post and the Chairman would persuade the Health Minister of Punjab to make available the services of Dr.K.L.Wig for appointment in the Institute. The appointments of Dr. Sujoy B.Roy as Professor of Cardiology, Dr. R.B Arora as Professor of Pharmacology were approved in 1957.

#### 60 Teaching Beds of Safdarjang and New Zealand Grant

7. The decision not to construct a Hospital for AIIMS was taken in view of the lack of finances and increased cost on their buildings and equipment and was deferred till the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five Year Plan. Dr Jivraj Mehta as Director General Health Services offered 60 beds in Safdarjang Hospital for teaching purposes for the Departments of Medicine and Surgery as Professors had been appointed in these Departments. That said, the Institute accepted the Pounds 1 million grant from New Zealand for construction of the Hospital at the Institute and construction was taken up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plan Period.

#### AIIMS – The Autonomous Institute from 15th November 1956

8. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur protected the autonomous nature of the Institute. She maintained that the Institute became autonomous from 15<sup>th</sup> November 1956 and all posts with a minimum pay of Rs. 600/- per month or more would be created with the approval of the Government, while no prior approval was necessary for posts carrying a minimum pay of less than Rs. 600/- per month<sup>7</sup>. It was based on this decision, that the Governing Body decided to fill 35 posts of Assistant Professors without prior approval of Government. The Governing Body ensured that the autonomous nature of the Institute was preserved. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur had created an international face for the Institute by collaborations with Rockefeller Foundation and the Government of New Zealand and encouraged further collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh. The AIIMS insignia was approved by the Governing Body in 1958 and slogan was decided in consultation with Vice President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan<sup>8</sup>. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur permitted Governing Body meetings to be chaired by Dr. Jivraj Mehta in her absence<sup>9</sup>. Dr Jivraj Mehta led Governing Body decided to relax conditions of admission to candidates of Nepal under the technical cooperation scheme of the Colombo Plan as also students from Burma. The Institute permitted exchange of post graduate students by sending AIIMS senior students abroad and getting some students from abroad. The Nursing College at Delhi was shifted to the Institute and amalgamated with it in 1958.



<sup>6</sup> Minutes of Governing Body meeting dated 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1957

<sup>7</sup> Agenda Item 2, Governing Body meeting dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 1958

<sup>8</sup> Agenda 9 (c) of the Governing Body Meeting dated 9<sup>th</sup> March 1958

<sup>9</sup> Governing Body meetings dated 16/9/1958, 7/6/ 1960, 6/10/1960 were chaired by Dr. Jivraj Mehta



## AIIMS DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS RAJ KUMARI AMRIT KAUR

### AIIMS - the Apex Medical Sciences University of India

9. The discussions in the Governing Body indicate the passion with which Rajkumari Amrit Kaur pursued institution building. By 1959, the Institute had 350 beds at the Institute and 84 teaching beds for medical and surgical cases at the Safdarjang Hospital in addition to the Nursing College. The Institute continued to make out a case for the transfer of the Safdarjang Hospital to the Institute in addition to the 650 beds that were planned for the Institute<sup>10</sup>.

10. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur maintained that the AIIMS be mandated with the responsibility of development of patterns of teaching in Under Graduate and Post Graduate Medical Education to all medical colleges and allied institutions of the country. It was for this reason that she said she chaired the Governing Body of the Institute and would run it as an autonomous institute through the Standing Committees namely Finance Committee and Selection Committee both chaired by Dr. Jivraj Mehta the Director General Health Services, the Academic Committee and the Building Committee. The Membership of the Institute Body was pan-India representative, with medical faculties from Indian Universities, Members of Parliament, Distinguished Medical Educationists, members of the Indian Science Congress and representatives of Ministries of Education and Finance. The close collaboration of AIIMS with the Indian Medical Council, the Indian Council of Medical Research were developed in pursuance of the objective of developing the apex Medical Sciences University of India.

11. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's vision envisaged selection of students for admission to the under-graduate MBBS course in AIIMS is made after an open advertisement, on the results of an open competitive test, strictly on merit with equal opportunities to students from any part of the country. The advertisements calling for applications would be issued in all important newspapers of India. In the case of Post Graduate Studies, the candidates would be selected after calling for applications on an all India basis, and the selections were made by a selection committee. It was with this backdrop, the AIIMS entrance examination was conducted in 5 cities in 1956, 1957 and 1958 namely Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Nagpur and Delhi with 400 candidates appearing for 50 MBBS seats.

### AIIMS – global recognition

12. The performance of AIIMS by 1961 was noticed in international for a. The Massachusetts General Hospital on the occasion of its 150<sup>th</sup> celebration, placed AIIMS in the list of most distinguished hospitals of America, Canada and Europe and presented Rajkumari Amrit Kaur with a medallion and a 'Book of Citation'. Dr. B.B.Dixit in his letter to the Chairman, Board of Trustees Massachusetts General Hospital mentions how greatly AIIMS would cherish the citation – "This undertaking unites education and research in a courageous manner to meet the health needs of 400 million people" and AIIMS shall try its best to live upto these expectations<sup>11</sup>.

### Manorville

13. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur chaired her last Governing Body meeting of AIIMS on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1963. The Governing Body accepted her gift of "Manorville", her residential building at summer hill Shimla to the Institute for rest and relaxation of doctors and nurses of AIIMS. A truly unparalleled gesture in the history of the Institute<sup>12</sup>.

14. On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of AIIMS, we rededicate ourselves to this vision of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur to meet the health needs of 1.25 billion people in medical education and research in a courageous manner.



<sup>10</sup> Governing Body Meeting dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 1959

<sup>11</sup> DO letter no: P-D/61-Misc (Pres) from Dr. B.B.Dixit Director to The Chairman Board of Trustees Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston USA dated February 28, 1961 sourced from Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

<sup>12</sup> Agenda item 21 (a) Governing Body meeting dated August 14, 1963





It is true that AIIMS came to be under the Nehru government. However, the real driving force behind it was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.



#### LIST OF WOMEN MEMBERS OF CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

| Name of the Member       | Date of Signing Register | Constituency                        |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Ammu Swaminathan      | 9 December 1946          | Madras/General                      |
| 2. Annie Mascarene       | 29 December 1948         | Travancore and Cochin Union         |
| 3. Begum Aizaz Rasul     | 14 July 1947             | United Provinces/Muslim             |
| 4. Dakshayani Velayudan  | 9 December 1946          | Madras/General                      |
| 5. G. Durgabai           | 9 December 1946          | Madras/General                      |
| 6. Hansa Mehta           | 9 December 1946          | Bombay/General                      |
| 7. Kamla Chaudhri        | 9 December 1946          | United Provinces/General            |
| 8. Leela Ray             | 9 December 1946          | West Bengal/General                 |
| 9. Malati Chowdhury      | 9 December 1946          | Orissa/General                      |
| 10. Purnima Banerji      | 9 December 1946          | United Provinces/General            |
| 11. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur | 21 December 1946         | Central Provinces and Berar/General |
| 12. Renuka Ray           | 14 July 1947             | West Bengal/General                 |
| 13. Sarojini Naidu       | 9 December 1946          | Bihar/General                       |
| 14. Sucheta Kripalani    | 9 December 1946          | United Provinces/General            |
| 15. Vijayalakshmi Pandit | 17 December 1946         | United Provinces/General            |

Also, kindly visit these Web Links

[01] <https://sikhism.net.in/world-religions/sikhism/great-famous-sikh-women/rajkumari-amrit-kaur.php>

[02] <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/learn-about-rajkumari-amrit-kaur/lwVxJZq1ZEmmWg?hl=en>

[03] <https://www.womenineconpolicy.com/post/boss-lady-7-rajkumari-amrit-kaur>

[04] <https://indianliberals.in/content/rajkumari-amrit-kaur-philanthropy-and-politics/>

[05] <https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/women-in-cad-iv/>

[06] [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/761593/1/Eminent Parliamentarians Series Rajkumari Amrit Kaur English.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://eparlib.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/761593/1/Eminent%20Parliamentarians%20Series%20Rajkumari%20Amrit%20Kaur%20English.pdf)

[07] <https://www.iasexpress.net/rajkumari-amrit-kaur/>

[08] <https://aishwaryasandeep.wordpress.com/2021/01/27/iw13/>

[09] <https://www.peepultree.world/livehistoryindia/story/people/amrit-kaur-indias-first-female-cabinet-minister?srsId=AfmBOogizV5D4cpyNmz8ftwGRa4LtNvoj4Kil2PW-ujtz4p-aHPx2ObX>

[10] <https://www.indianculture.gov.in/photo-archives/lord-and-lady-mountbatten-rajkumari-amrit-kaur-and-patricia-mountbatten-funeral>

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## **Makers of Indian Constitution | Rajkumari Amrit Kaur**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-1x4x02HW8>

Women who contributed in making the Indian Constitution. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: She was the founder of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and argued for its autonomy. She was a firm believer in women's education, their participation in sports and their healthcare.

### **Videos**

#### **First Health Minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRqIWNXuJgQ> [3:03]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: India's first health minister | Feminism in India**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf4kKNVAvxQ> [3:25]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: A princess in service of her nation**

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=795343887843466> [3:18]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur | Important Personalities for UPSC History**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoVgRLrtfI> [15:24]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur/Vellalore Annaswamy Sundaram/The Journey of Freedom Movement with AIR**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf1jLAcAMBM> [6:15]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Biography | India's First Woman Cabinet Minister Amrit Kaur History**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBxsgKx5zdg> [4:27]

#### **Constituent Assembly Female Member - Rajkumari Amrit Kaur**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYdXgmC4\\_ec](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYdXgmC4_ec) [5:51]

#### **Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: India's Trailblazing Princess of Public Health**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VddIc5vln2g> [8:00]



**Renuka Ray**  
(04.01.1904 - 11.04.1997)

## Renuka Ray

<https://www.constitutionofindia.net/members/reduka-ray/>

### Early Life

**Born** on 4th January 1903, Renuka Ray went on to receive education from Loreto House School and Diocesan College, Calcutta. Ray **keenly** followed the Indian political developments from a young age. Persuaded by Gandhi's call for fight against the British rule, she joined Gandhi's ashram and accompanied him in protests. Later, she went on to obtain a degree from the London School of Economics.

### Role in India's Independence Movement

Ray was a prominent women's rights advocate. She was a legal secretary to the All India Women's Conference and authored "Legal Disabilities of Women in India; A Plea for a Commission of Enquiry". She **closely** worked on prevention of women trafficking and improvement of conditions for women labourers.

### Contribution to Constitution Making

Ray was **elected** to the Constituent Assembly from West Bengal. She made several interventions in the Assembly including on women's rights issues, minorities rights and bicameral legislature provision.

### Later Contributions

Ray **represented** India in U.N. General Assembly in May 1949. She was also elected to the West Bengal Legislature in 1952 and the Parliament in 1957. Ray was **awarded** Padma Bhushan for her services in public affairs in 1988.

### Key Writings



Ray authored '[My Reminiscences: Social Development During Gandhian Era And After](#)'. The Telegraph in their [review](#) noted that the book provided "a broad view of Indian social development through the first decade of the 20th century till the Seventies".


## Speeches:

1. Ray [argued](#) against special constitutional privileges and reservation for women.
2. During the discussion on religious rights, Ray [moved](#) an amendment to bar religious instructions in public-funded schools.
3. She was not [convinced](#) with 'bicameral legislature' working in the Indian political set-up.

## Resources:

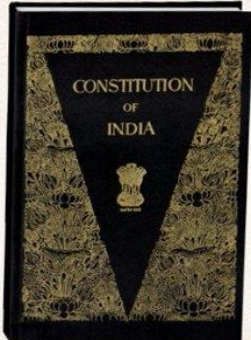
1. [Renuka Ray: Gandhian, Politician, And Constituent Assembly Member / #IndianWomenInHistory](#) by Sarah Carlos (Feminism in India, 2020).
2. [A Gandhian and activist - Renuka Ray memoirs](#) (The Telegraph, 2005)


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Department of  
School Education & Literacy  
Ministry of Education, Govt. of India

# KnowYour Constitution









“

Renuka Ray was part of the Constituent Assembly from West Bengal. She made several interventions in the Assembly, including on women's rights issues, minority rights and bicameral legislature provisions. She also joined the All-India Women's Conference and campaigned for women's rights and inheritance rights in parental property.

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# Renuka Ray

Kolkata, West Bengal

Renuka Ray, born on 4 January 1904, in Calcutta, Bengal Presidency, was a notable freedom fighter, social activist, and politician in India. Descended from Brahmo reformer Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee, she was the daughter of ICS officer Satish Chandra Mukherjee and Charulata Mukherjee, a social worker involved with the All India Women's Conference.

Renuka was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and left college to boycott British education. Later, persuaded by her parents and Gandhi, she studied at the London School of Economics in 1921. She married Satyendra Nath Ray early in life. Her maternal grandfather, Prof. P. K. Roy, was the first Indian DPhil from Oxford and the first Indian Principal of Presidency College, Calcutta. Her grandmother, Sarala Roy, a social worker and founder of Gokhale Memorial School and College, was the first Indian woman on Calcutta University's senate.

Upon returning to India, Ray joined the All India Women's Conference, advocating for women's rights and inheritance rights. She served as its President in 1932 and 1953-54. In 1943, she was nominated to the Central Legislative Assembly, representing Indian women, and later became a member of the Constituent Assembly of India (1946-47). From 1952-57, she was West Bengal's Minister of Relief & Rehabilitation and served as a Lok Sabha member from Malda (1957-1967). In 1959, she chaired the Renuka Ray Committee on Social Welfare and Welfare of Backward Classes.



Name mentioned in the book "Women in Satyagraha" by Publications Division Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Government of India (Page no – 42).

RENUKA RAY: A STALWART ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY

Renuka Ray, born on 4th January 1903, emerged as a beacon of change in the landscape of India's struggle for independence and the subsequent framing of its constitution. A devout follower of Mahatma Gandhi, Ray's journey was marked by unwavering commitment to social justice, women's rights, and constitutional principles.

BASIC DETAILS AND BIOGRAPHY OF RENUKA RAY:

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Birthdate                           | 4th January 1903                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Deathdate                           | 1997                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Party Affiliation                   | Indian National Congress                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Constituency                        | West Bengal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Mother Tongue                       | Bangla                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Education                           | Graduate                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Committee Memberships               | None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Notable Contributions               | - Advocate for women's rights and inheritance rights - Author of 'Legal Disabilities of Women in India: A Plea for a Commission of Inquiry' - Worked against women trafficking and for the improvement of conditions of female labourers - Fought for Uniform Personal Law Code - Represented India in the UN General Assembly in 1949. |
| Role in Independence Movement       | - Inspired by Gandhi, joined his Ashram and participated in protests.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Contribution to Constitution Making | - Elected to the Constituent Assembly from West Bengal - Advocated for women's rights, minority rights, and a Uniform Personal Law Code.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Later Contributions                 | - Represented India in the UN General Assembly - Elected to West Bengal Legislature in 1952 - Member of Parliament in 1957 - Awarded Padma Bhushan in 1988.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Key Writings                        | - 'My Reminiscences: Social Development During Gandhian Era and After'.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Key Speeches                        | - Advocated against special constitutional privileges and reservations for women - Moved an amendment to prohibit religious instructions in public-funded schools - Expressed scepticism about the efficacy of a 'bicameral legislature'.                                                                                               |

## EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Ray's early education at Loreto House School and Diocesan College, Calcutta, laid the foundation for her intellectual prowess. The Indian political scenario, undergoing transformation in the early 20th century, became a subject of deep interest for Ray. Inspired by Gandhi's clarion call for the fight against British rule, she joined Gandhi's ashram, actively participating in protests that shaped her commitment to the cause of independence. Ray's quest for knowledge led her to the London School of Economics, where she honed her understanding of social and political dynamics.

## ROLE IN INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

A staunch advocate for women's rights, Ray played a pivotal role as the legal secretary to the All-India Women's Conference. In 1934, she authored a seminal work, 'Legal Disabilities of Women in India: A Plea for a Commission of Enquiry,' addressing the systemic challenges faced by women. Her work extended beyond theory, as she actively worked towards the prevention of women trafficking and tirelessly campaigned for the improvement of conditions for female laborers. Ray's efforts during this period laid the groundwork for her enduring legacy as a champion of gender equality.

## CONTRIBUTION TO CONSTITUTION MAKING

Ray's journey took a constitutional turn as she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from West Bengal. Her interventions in the Assembly reflected her commitment to women's rights, minority rights, and the structure of the bicameral legislature. Notably, she advocated for a Uniform Personal Law Code, emphasizing equality and justice for all citizens.

## LATER CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOGNITION

Ray's commitment to public service extended beyond the Constituent Assembly. In 1949, she represented India in the United Nations General Assembly, showcasing her dedication to global issues. Elected to the West Bengal Legislature in 1952 and the Parliament in 1957, Ray continued to shape India's political landscape. Her exemplary services were recognized with the prestigious Padma Bhushan in 1988, a testament to her enduring impact on public affairs.

## KEY WRITINGS AND SPEECHES

Ray's literary contributions include the autobiographical work 'My Reminiscences: Social Development During Gandhian Era And After.' This insightful piece provided a panoramic view of Indian social development from the early 20th century to the Seventies.

In her speeches, Ray passionately argued against special constitutional privileges and reservations for women, promoting the idea of equal opportunities. During discussions on religious rights, she moved an amendment



to prohibit religious instructions in public-funded schools, underlining her commitment to a secular educational system. Her skepticism about the efficacy of a 'bicameral legislature' in the Indian political setup showcased her critical thinking and commitment to refining the democratic process.

In conclusion, Renuka Ray's life and work stand as an inspiring testament to the transformative power of individuals dedicated to the principles of justice, equality, and constitutional ideals. Her legacy continues to resonate, reminding us of the indomitable spirit required to shape a nation's destiny.

#### SELECTED SPEECHES FROM CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES: EQUALITY OF STATUS AND JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. President, Sir, I rise to support Clause 19 and in particular Section (2) of this Clause which provides for territorial representation without reservation of seats. We are particularly opposed to the reservation of seats for women. Ever since the start of the Womens' Movement in this country, women have been fundamentally opposed to special privileges and reservations (hear, hear). Through the centuries of our decadence, subjection and degradation, the position of women too has gone down until she has gradually lost all her rights both in law and in society. Nonetheless, with the first stirrings of consciousness amongst women, there never arose any narrow suffragist movement that has been so common in so many so-called enlightened nations. Women in this country have striven for their rights, for equality of status, for justice and fairplay and most of all to be able to take their part in responsible work in the service of their country. The social backwardness of women has been sought to be exploited in the same manner as backwardness of so many sections in this country by those who wanted to deny the country its freedom.

Before the 1935 Act came in, the representatives of India's women made it very clear that they were against the reservation of seats or any special privileges for women. They made this clear through the All India Women's Conference. Our representatives, the three women who gave evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee, made it clear in unequivocal terms — (I may say that Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was one of the three women) — that we did not want reservation, but in spite of our protests, and in direct contravention to our desires, reservation of seats was brought into the 1935 Act. This Act has been so great a factor in bringing dissensions in our fold and has at last divided the country. But where the heart is strong, where there is sound judgment, no machinations can divide and the women did not allow themselves to be caught in the trap. It would be wrong to say that all the credit for our attitude goes to women. From the very start of our national awakening in this country, enlightened men have encouraged women to come forward as equal partners in the struggle for freedom and to do service for national regeneration in the different walks of life. When Mahatma Gandhi gave his call so specifically to the women of this country to take part in the national movement, all the social

barriers of centuries broke down. There are no words to convey the gratitude of the women of this country to this great man — who has today brought the country to the very threshold of freedom (hear, hear). So, it is not only the inherent qualities of women but more particularly I should say the qualities of our men that is responsible for the fact that in our country, there has never been any strife between men and women.

When the Hindu Law Reform Bills were put in the Central Assembly, women were naturally anxious that these Bills which conceded certain rights to them should be adopted, but we found an opposition which was not so great in numerical strength but which was very formidable because of the fact that it was from a reactionary group who were the erstwhile supporters of the then Government and who were also betraying the country at every turn. The alien Government could not afford to displease them, and unless we too were willing to barter away our souls and our birthright, we could not fight that opposition.

Sir, what we have upheld so long has come to pass today. We always held that when the men who have fought and struggled for their country's freedom came to power, the rights and liberties of women too would be guaranteed. We already see the evidence of this today. No reservation of seats was required to induce the men who are today in power to select a woman as Ambassador, the second in the history of any nation. Vijayalakshmi Pandit has not been selected because she is a woman nor was sex made a bar to the appointment. It is her proven worth that has been responsible for her appointment to the high office of ambassador to a land which is admittedly one of the greatest forces in the world today. This has vindicated our position and women are indeed proud of this. I am confident that it will not be only women of exceptional ability who in future will be called upon to occupy positions of responsibility, but all women who are equally capable, equally able as men will be considered irrespective of sex.

In the legislatures of India, we have some women, but there are few women who have come from general constituencies. I think that the psychological factor comes into play when there is reservation of seats for women. When there is reservation of seats for women, the question of their consideration for general seats, however competent they may be, does not usually arise. We feel that women will get more chances in the future to come forward and work in the free India, if the consideration is of ability alone.

With these words, Sir, I should like to support this Clause which has done away once and for all with reservation of seats for women, which we consider to be an impediment to our growth and an insult to our very intelligence and capacity.

#### QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AND MAJORITIES IN A SECULAR STATE

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Sir, I rise to oppose this last amendment. The report of the Advisory Committee shows very clearly that its authors have done their utmost to satisfy all elements in the country. In fact,

Sir, if the report has erred it has erred in the direction of over generosity to the so-called minorities. In order to allay suspicion and distrust and to come to an agreed solution it has given every consideration to those who are swayed by communal and religious considerations even to the sacrifice of national interests. After all Sir, it is not a question of minorities and majorities on a religious basis that we should consider in a democratic secular State. We have agreed to the reservation of seats just for the time being for the next ten years to allow those who cannot think of themselves in terms of "Indians" to adjust themselves over this period. I am surprised that the Mover of this amendment should have persisted today in bringing it forward. After the stirring appeal that was made by Sardar Patel and the very cogent and comprehensive arguments put forward by Pandit Pant to show that separate electorates are not only discordant and jarring to national interests but against the interests of the very communities for which they are intended, I thought he would not have pressed this amendment.

It is a back door method of bringing in separate electorates, which the House did not accept yesterday. Sir, we have stood aside helplessly while artificially this problem of religious differences — an echo of medieval times, has been fostered and nurtured and enhanced by the method of political devices such as separate electorates in order to serve the interests of our alien rulers. Today we see as a result our country divided and provinces like my own dismembered. We see that many who have made sacrifices, in the struggle for the freedom of India cannot be citizens of India today. We have learnt indeed a bitter lesson. We have submitted to all this so that at least in the rest of India that remains with us now we may go ahead in forming a democratic secular State without bringing in religion to cloud the issue. Religion is a personal matter. Religious differences might have been exploited as a political expedient by the British but there is no room for that in the India of today. Sir, the problem, that faces us is not a problem of minorities or of majorities on a religious basis. The problem that faces us is the problem of the vast majority in the country irrespective of religion, the majority who today are surrounded by ignorance and ill-health, hunger and want. It is they who are the backward sections

of the community and who are the majority at the same time. It is their problem that we have to take up. If we want to make the Objectives Resolution that this House has passed and the Fundamental Rights that have been laid down, a living reality, it is this problem that we have got to tackle. We cannot allow any subtle devices by the back door such as restricted separate electorates to sidetrack us now from the main issue. We cannot expect those who are backward to function and participate as citizens with equal rights unless we take steps to make them conscious of their rights. By all means let us do all that we can to help their development through every means in our power, and make such provision in the Constitution. But a separatist tendency on the basis of religion is something that I do not think we can tolerate any longer. We have never stood nor do we stand today for Hindu domination; we

do not want that Hindus as such as a religious community shall override any other interests. But we do want that India's interests shall be paramount, that the interests of no special community shall stand in the way, whether it is a majority or a minority religious community. Sir, I hope that this House will throw out this amendment and that we shall be able to go ahead until we are able to find a solution for the real problems that confront us, so that India can take her proper place in the comity of nations; so that in accordance with the cultural heritage which is ours, enriched by the variety of the cultures, that have found a home in this country, we will be enabled to play an effective part in the harmonious development of the world as a whole.

#### AGAINST RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS IN PUBLIC FUNDED SCHOOLS

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. President, Sir, I move my amendment leaving out the first part, namely—

That for Clause 16, the following be substituted:-

"No denominational religious instruction shall be provided in schools maintained by the State. No person attending any school or educational institution recognised or aided by the State shall be compelled to attend any such religious instruction."

Sir, I feel that the framers of the Report did not intend to imply what this Clause does imply, namely, that instruction given in schools maintained by the State or out of public funds may be of a denominational character. Surely denominational schools cannot be run by a democratic secular State. Such schools may be recognised or even aided, but as the State, we envisage under the new Constitution, will be secular having no State religion as such, it cannot set up denominational religious institutions as State schools.

I do not want to make a long speech; I merely want to point out that if my amendment is substituted for Clause 16, then this interpretation will not be possible and what this Clause is intended to convey, will be brought out better. I hope the House will realise the necessity of making this substitution.

Sir, even before we have freedom, the Central Advisory Board of Education decided that the education that was to be given by the State in this country should not be of a denominational character and that religious education of a denomination character was the responsibility of the community and the home to which the child belongs and not of the State. I am sure that now that we have to fashion our own destinies and we are in a position to usher in that free and democratic State for which we have striven and for which so many have sacrificed and died, it is open to us to say that we do not want to be inconsistent. We do not want to bring in an educational system whereby the education given by the State will be in direct contravention to the ideals and the interests of the State itself. I do not say that denominational religious education should not be allowed. But education given by the State should have



the teaching of moral and spiritual values; it cannot by the very nature of the State be of a denominational religious character. I hope that Sardar Patel will accept this amendment, because it is not in contravention to the desire of the Committee. It merely tries to clarify the issue. The Clause as it now stands may be misunderstood to mean that we are submitting to the State having denominational educational institutions as a part of its educational programme of policy.

#### A CRITIQUE OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Sir, the main features of the Draft Constitution embody the principles of a democratic federation and as such should win the approbation of all. At the same time there are certain matters which I feel are not quite explicit or in which changes are required, if this constitution is to conform to those ideals which actuated India during its many years of struggle and which are embodied in the Objectives Resolution to which our Prime Minister referred yesterday. Sir, I agree with my Honorable friend Dr. Ambedkar that it is the spirit in which the Constitution is worked that really counts. I feel that whatever the paper Constitution may be, it is the spirit in which we are able to work it, that will make all the difference. Again, whatever Constitution we may draw up today, it will not be possible for us to foretell how it will fit in with our requirements in its actual working and with the inherent genius of our race. It is, therefore, quite essential, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, that the Constitution at present should be flexible. I think amendments of the Constitution should be by simple majority for the next ten years so that there may be opportunities for adaptations and modifications in the light of experience.

Turning to the citizenship Clause, I think there should be a categorical statement in it about a single uniform citizenship with equal rights and privileges. As rights involve responsibilities, so it is necessary that the obligations of citizenship should also be enumerated in this Clause.

With regard to Fundamental Rights, equal rights have been prescribed. Quite rightly, it has been laid down that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race or sex. But in view of conditions in this country and in view of some of the opinions expressed by the public — and the last speaker's chivalry touched us deeply — I think it is necessary to have an explicit provision that social laws of marriage and inheritance of the different communities shall not also have any disabilities attached to them on grounds of caste or sex. It is, of course, true that the right of equality includes this but there may be different interpretations and much confusion and I therefore appeal to the House to have a proviso to explain this.

I will not repeat what my honourable friend Shri Ananthasayanam Ayyangar said but I do feel that in regard to the economic rights of the common man there is a lacuna. Although I agree that the provision "that no person shall be

deprived of his property save by the authority of the law" is alright, I do not, at the same time, see why under justiciable rights one should have the second part of this Clause which goes into details about compensations when property is taken by the State for public purposes in accordance with law. Surely if there is any need for putting this into the Constitution it should be under directives and not under rights which are justiciable and enforceable in courts of law. It is not right that we should commit the future to the economic structure of the present. Turning to education, which I consider to be one of the most fundamental of rights, I feel there is a great inadequacy. I do not want to repeat what other speakers have said, but I would appeal to the House to include a proviso whereby a definite proportion of the budget is allotted for this purpose. This is nothing very new; it is already there in the Constitution of China which says:

"Educational appropriations shall set apart not less than 15 per cent of the total amount of the budget of the Central Government and not less than 30 per cent of the total amount of the provincial, district and municipal budgets respectively."

If we are to progress and prosper I suggest that in the matter of the two nation-building services of education and public health there should be some provision in the Constitution of the type that is there in the Chinese Constitution.

With regard to the reservation of seats for minorities we have not, of course, in a secular State provided for separate electorates, but I do not see why we should have reservation of seats for minorities. It is psychologically wrong to lay down, as it has been laid down, that after ten years the right shall lapse unless extended by amendment. I am sure that if this privilege is conceded now there will be a clamour for its extension. It is not fair to these minorities; it is not self-respecting for them. If the House wants to ensure representation for minorities I would suggest multiple constituencies with cumulative voting. Some speakers have suggested proportional representation by single transferable vote. I think that is a difficult procedure particularly for India and I would not recommend it. But I think that multiple constituencies with cumulative voting has a great deal to recommend it. In the first place, it will give much better representation not only to these minorities but to others; and it will also be a method of ensuring representation to the minorities without creating a separatist tendency. The last speaker Shri Rohini Chaudhari the erstwhile champion and defender of women who is against removing their social disabilities spoke about special electorates for women. All along the women of India have been against reservation of seats or special electorates. Before the 1935 Act came in we were against it and put forward our views in no uncertain terms, but it was forced upon us; and today, in spite of the chivalry of the previous speaker, Indian women will not tolerate any such reservations in the Constitution. I will not repeat what others have said about village panchayats. I feel that freed from the shackles of ignorance and superstition, the

panchayat of the Gandhian village will certainly be the backbone of the structure of this country's Constitution. I do not think there is anything in the Constitution that can bar it.

Coming to the allocation of powers between the units and the Centre, I think we must approach this subject dispassionately. There is a great deal to be said for giving as much provincial autonomy as possible. At the same time, where a country has a tremendous leeway to make up, particularly in the nation-building services, the unifying force must be strong and the Centre should be given some power of a supervisory and co-ordinating character, in regard to both education and health. I do not think the provinces should be crippled by taking away from them certain financial securities. They should at least be given 60 percent of the income-tax according to the recommendations of the expert committee, 35 percent on the basis of collection, 20 percent on the basis of population and 5 per cent for hard cases. This is a very good recommendation and I hope this House will agree to embody it in the Constitution. I also feel that a Financial Commission should be set up immediately and not after five years.

Before I conclude, I wish to say something about linguistic provinces. Unity must be our watchword today and it is a fatal mistake to allow realignment of provincial boundaries on a linguistic basis at this juncture of our country's history. It has already led to much bitterness and strife and will lead to more. There is no justice or logic if such a thing is allowed in one part of the country and not in others. For instance if you allow a province of Maharashtra to be formed, naturally there will be other parts which will want it. There is in Bengal a feeling of great bitterness that she who has sacrificed part of her territories so that the transfer of power could take place should be denied her rights, now. It was because of the political expediency of the British and to suit the purposes of an alien Government that Bengal was forcibly deprived of much of its territory when the movement for the freedom of India started here. I do not subscribe to the theory that we should have a reallocation on a linguistic basis at this time. If it is to be done at all it should be done after ten years when passions have subsided. In any case, for administrative purposes there is no need for a linguistic realignment. Linguistic minorities in every province should have a guarantee that they will be given education in their mother tongue. I would urge that the Linguistic Boundary Commission should stop work or in any case it should be put off for ten years. I repeat that the overriding consideration is that of unity, if we want that India should be strong and prosperous and should take its rightful place in the comity of nations.

#### **PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND ABOLITION OF DEVDASI SYSTEM**

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I shall try to be as brief as possible.

The awakened conscience of women in India and the world is fully alive to the problem of the traffic in women and cannot tolerate its continuance. Sir, if we do not accept the amendment of Mr. B. Das, it is not because we do not appreciate his purpose. We realise that he wishes to place particular emphasis on the problem of the traffic in women, but I do think that the Article as it stands, does cover it. I am merely pointing this out because it may be thought that the women members of this House are not alive to this problem. It is one of the most urgent of all problems on which women's organisations in this country, have focussed their attention for some time past.

As for the amendment that my honourable friend, Mr. K.T. Shah, moved, I agree with Shrimati Durgabai that legislation has covered this problem in regard to Madras, but I think that if Mr. Shah's amendment could be accepted by this House so that the Devdasi system—the dedication of women in temples—is abolished by a categorical provision in the Constitution, it would be better procedure as the custom still lingers in some areas. Otherwise it is to be hoped that legislation abolishing the custom in other parts where it still exists will soon come in. I want to stress the fact that women are fully alive to the fact that it is the dual standards of morality that have led to traffic in women. It is when society realises fully the need for doing away with dual standards of morality that this Article that is being adopted can really come into effect and become a reality and not merely a paper provision in the Constitution.

Acts for the prevention of immoral traffic in women do exist already in this country but their operation is not effective and even if legal flaws are amended, these can only become really effective when men's minds change towards this problem, whereby a section of women are at the mercy of exploiters whereby the very dignity of womanhood is lowered.

#### FOR AN EDUCATION UNBLEMISHED BY THE LEGACY OF RELIGIOUS STRIFE

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal : General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, while supporting this Article, there are one or two points on which I should like some elucidation. Prof. K.T. Shah has brought forward a point which really needs to be cleared up. Part (1) of this Article says: "No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds". There is likelihood of this being misinterpreted in the future, so as to nullify its very object. As he has pointed out even if a small donation is paid to a public school, it can be held that such a school is not wholly maintained out of State funds, and therefore denominational religious instruction may be given. I hope that when Dr. Ambedkar speaks, he will clear up this point because it is a very important one. If such interpretation can be given then it is necessary to have safeguards against it.

In this country we have seen the exploitation, and the prostitution of what we call religion and we have seen to our bitter cost what is done in the name of



denominational religion. It has not only led to the dismemberment and division of our country, but it has also led to the worst horrors that could be perpetrated in the name of religion. Now, when we are building for the future, we must build in such a manner that we are able to do so untrammelled by the legacy of the past. The only real way in which this could be done is to see that the next generation are educated in such a manner that they are not actuated by motives that divide and disintegrate man from man, but that the religion of humanity is much greater to them than religious dissensions on a denominational religious basis. If that is to be so, we must be very careful, now that we are building up the Constitution for the future, that there shall not be in the fundamental rights any kind of confusion as to the kind of instruction that is to be given at least in those institution that are maintained out of public funds. If we use this word "wholly", there is likely to be this confusion that has been already pointed out and I would like to hear from Dr. Ambedkar if it is possible for him either to accept this amendment or at least to assure the House that no such interpretation will be possible in the future.

I would again urge that he should accept in particular the amendment for the deletion of Clause (3) which has been moved by Mr. Jaspat Roy Kapoor, because as he has pointed out there is no doubt that if this Clause remains, there is likelihood that in a certain area where there may be a small number of schools or only one school, a fight between the various denominations as to which particular type of religious instruction should be given out of school hours may ensue. Therefore, it is much better that Clause (3) be deleted from this Article.

I am sure that all those in this House and the country outside will agree with me that above all things, it is necessary that the instruction that is given to the citizens of the future shall be such that the idea of a Secular State in which all citizens are equal comes into being, and the provision for this adopted in our Constitution becomes a living reality. This can only be done if education which is the very basis on which we build our society is so imparted to the young that they do not learn to realise the distinctions which separate man and man, but rather to learn that the underlying unity of humanity is more fundamental and the basis of religion to which they must adhere.

#### QUESTION OF BICAMERAL STATE LEGISLATURES

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. Vice-President, I am one of those who hold the opinion that the bicameral legislature in the present context of things is unnecessary, if not retrograde. Sir, in India, particularly at the present moment, when we need to go through a good deal of legislation in the economic and social field, which has been long overdue during the years of foreign rule, I do feel that the Second Chamber, particularly in the provinces will be very dilatory. The only reason advanced for having a Second Chamber is that we can thus prevent hasty or careless legislation. But, Sir, when there is a Governor, in the Province and a President at the Centre, who is

empowered to send back to the legislature any Bills which may have been enacted carelessly, for revision, I do not think that this excuse obtains. However, Sir, the majority of provinces have decided to have a Second Chamber and therefore, in the present Constitution, we shall be embodying it. I want to point out only this, that even if we at the present moment do have to agree to have Second Chambers in the provinces, there should be some provision in the Constitution that the Second Chambers can be got rid of as speedily as possible, not at the initiative or the votes of both Houses of Legislature in the provinces, but according to the desire of the Lower House alone. I do not think that it is right that whether a Chamber shall continue to exist or not, should be left to the Chamber to decide in any way. Although there is an Article in the Draft Constitution regarding the manner in which the provinces may decide later not to have Second Chambers, if they do not wish to, that Article prescribes that this can be done by both Houses of the Legislature. I hope, Sir, that when the time comes, at least the House and Dr. Ambedkar will agree that it should be the Lower House alone which shall decide whether the Second Chamber should continue or not. As I said before, I do not think that bringing in the Second Chamber is going to be helpful at the present moment. I do understand that the composition of the Second Chamber is going to be fundamentally different from the composition of the Upper Houses of the past. But all the same in the present context of things, as I have said, it will be very much better if we had just one Chamber. As we have seen during the past year or so, while this Constituent Assembly has been functioning as a Dominion Legislature and with an unicameral Chamber, even so the procedure by which legislation is enacted is slower than we desire. I do not see why it is necessary, particularly in the Provinces, that we should go in for a Second Chamber, and if we do so, at least let us provide that the Lower Houses in the Provinces are in a position to rid themselves of this encumbrance as soon as possible.

#### SECOND CHAMBER IN PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE: A DILATORY CHAMBER?

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. President, Sir, I rise to support this amendment which I think is an extremely wholesome one. I was one of those who believed that a Second Chamber was not a necessity and that in fact in many of the smaller Provinces it will be a very expensive luxury. All the same, it has been incorporated in the Constitution with the avowed object that the Second Chamber was necessary as a revising Chamber. It was pointed out that inadvertently or otherwise it may be possible for the Lower House to pass legislation which it would find difficult to rectify later and the Second Chamber might serve the purpose of revision. This was the object put forward for which a Second Chamber was acceptable to the majority. But now we find that there are some who would like to have it in the form of a Chamber with dilatory functions. For if we are going to allow six months, if joint sessions are going to be allowed it would mean that the Second Chamber would not only be just for the sake of revising a Bill which has some defects, and which the

Legislative Assembly itself would like to revise, but it would also be tantamount to acting as a dilatory Chamber, which would be extremely retrograde. Because we have agreed to having Second Chambers in some of the Provinces, it does not mean that we should give it more powers and have a Chamber with dilatory functions imposed in the Constitution. I myself am of the opinion that the purpose for which a revising Chamber has been sought to be put in was also not necessary because the President or Governor has the power always to send back a piece of legislation to the Assembly and any mistakes could be rectified through this procedure. However, if the majority felt otherwise and put the Second Chamber in the Constitution, there is no reason whatsoever to give it more power and thus hold up legislation, which may be very pressing and necessary. The dilatory powers would be injurious for the country and a very retrograde provision in the Constitution. I do feel that it seems to be the object of some of those who have spoken to bring in the type of Second Chamber that we had in the past. We talk of the composition being quite different; even if it is quite different, it is quite true that people, even if they were scientists or doctors, who go through the process of political life into Upper Chambers — or Lower Chambers for the matters of that — have to enter the arena of politics and Party Politics. Somebody said that Second Chamber would be for men like Rabindranath Tagore. But the best scientists and men of literature are not likely to enter Party Politics and come into the Second Chamber at any price. If their opinion has to be sought, it has to be sought from outside the Legislature in any case. Therefore, I would appeal that, although this House has agreed to a Second Chamber, it will not in any case agree to extending its powers, but accept this amendment which will give it only the functions of a revising nature.

#### SCARCE PROVINCIAL FINANCES

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal : General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I am one of those who believe that, in the present context of things in this country and in view of the fact that we have so much leeway to make up in the matter of the nation-building services, we should of course have a very strong federal Centre. It is necessary that the Centre should be in a position to see that the provinces do not fall behind in regard to the minimum standards of development. But, nonetheless, I must say that the arguments that Pandit Kunzru has advanced before the House this morning have a great deal in them. It is not possible for a province to administer its responsibilities in an adequate manner if its financial position is unstable or uncertain. I realise that it is in the case of emergencies alone that this power under Article 277 is sought to be given to the President, which means the Central Government. Nonetheless I do feel that this is a very drastic measure. The provinces draw their finances from two sources. One source is the obligatory allocation made to them to maintain their general services. The other is the grants made for development purposes. I could have understood it, if a demarcation had been made and the finances of the provinces had been left intact in the matter of obligatory taxes

with which they carry on their normal life. Even that has not been done. I do not want to reiterate all that Pandit Kunzru has very pertinently pointed out. I do feel that this is a vital matter. There is Article 276-B under which all extravagant expenditure during emergencies could be stopped. The provinces can be requested to drop their development programmes during an emergency such as war. But surely it should not be in the power of the Centre or the President to stop the normal functioning of the provinces. It is through the provinces that the life and activities of the people of the country is administered. I should like to point out that the Centre does not work in the air. It has to work through the provinces and I can see no reason whatsoever for having this provision just as it is. I do think that Pandit Kunzru has drawn attention to a very important point. I would therefore request Dr. Ambedkar and Drafting Committee to hold over this Article and re-draft it in the light of the observations that have been made.

Prof. N.G. Ranga (Madras: General): Hold over till the emergency is over?

Shrimati Renuka Ray: I do not mean that Professor Ranga has sought to be very sarcastic. I would point out to him that even in an emergency the normal functioning of the provinces must continue. I see no reason whatsoever to give the President power to stop those sources of revenue from which the provinces have to function in a normal way, even in an emergency. I can understand stopping the development activities of a province in an emergency, but how can the normal functioning of the provinces be stopped even in emergencies? Even in war-time, people have to continue to eat, to have education and be protected against evil-doers. I do appeal to Dr. Ambedkar and the Drafting Committee to reconsider this Article which is a vital one. I support the changes proposed by Pandit Kunzru.

#### ROLE OF CENTRE IN COORDINATING THE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS IN THE COUNTRY

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. Vice-President, Sir, I should like to support the amendment that has been moved by Mr. Basanta Kumar Das. It is a very wholesome amendment. As he has pointed out the first part of his amendment has already been accepted but 57(b) and (c) are also extremely important. The co-ordination of educational policy and, in particular, the maintaining of a uniform national minimum standard of education throughout the country is essential. Education is the very basis of our progress and advancement; and unless the Centre is able to co-ordinate education and to see that no part of the country falls behind a minimum standard of education, it is really impossible for us to advance. Any State or any area in this country which remains behind a minimum standard will be a drag on the rest of the country. Therefore, I feel that this is extremely essential. At the same time it is not possible for Provinces or States to maintain a minimum standard of education unless they have sufficient finances to do so.



At the present moment perhaps due to the many transitional difficulties we have faced and may be for other reasons upto now we have not been able to focus sufficient attention on these very essential nation-building services. Those services that were neglected and treated in a step-motherly manner in the past, under the old regime, have yet to get that help that they need in order that the country may progress. I would say that at least 25 to 30 per cent of our national income should be set aside immediately for the nation-building services. I do claim that in every province at least 15 if not 20 per cent of our national income should be set aside immediately for the nation-building services. In this country unless we can produce more we cannot increase our national income. It has been pointed out that unless we increase our national income how is it possible to find the money for these essential services? We have to break that vicious circle somewhere. It is not possible for our country to progress or produce more unless the efficiency of the worker is increased. Unless the worker is given the basic opportunities, how can efficiency be increased. This implies that there must be minimum standards for education and health. Unless the men and women who are the builders of society have a minimum standard of education and of health, it is not possible for us really to have any increase in efficiency, and unless we have increase in efficiency it is no use talking about producing more. I think it is at this end that we must tackle this problem.

If we are to do so, this particular amendment of Mr. Das will help towards this end. Both the points that he raised that the Centre must have power to co-ordinate and be able to see that no State remains behind a minimum standard and the fact that the States must be given sufficient financial assistance to be able to develop education are most important. I do not say that the Centre should have any power to interfere with any State going ahead of the minimum standard. That is not a power that is implied in this resolution. The power that is implied in this is that no State should remain behind the minimum standard and I do hope that Dr. Ambedkar and the Drafting Committee will consider this and will accept this amendment.

#### **ISSUE OF JUSTICIABILITY OF COMPENSATION IN THE EVENT OF ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY**

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal : General): Sir, I move:

"That in amendment No. 369 of List VII (Seventh Week), for clause (4) of the proposed Article 24, the following be substituted:-

'(4) No law making provision as aforesaid shall be called in question in any court either on the ground that the compensation provided for is inadequate or that the principles and the manner of compensation specific are fraudulent or inequitious.' "

I am compelled to move this amendment even at this late hour because we are faced with a very genuine and a real difficulty. By Clauses (4) and

(6) of the draft that we are considering, we find that pending legislation or legislation that has already been enacted in regard to compensation for property is to be treated on a different basis to compensation for all other types of property. If it becomes necessary to have an exemption Clause for certain types of zamindari property for coming to brass tacks, it means the Zamindari Bills of U.P. and those of Madras and Bihar are to be exempted—it necessarily follows that all other property including zamindari property in other areas must be justiciable. It means that the authority of the sovereign Parliament is to be challenged by courts of law. I know that there is difference of opinion amongst some of the lawyers. Some hold that although other forms of property are included as justiciable, the courts of law will not challenge the authority of Parliament in laying down principles of compensation until and unless there is intent to fraud. Other lawyers again support the view of the Supreme Court of the United States that the word 'compensation' means equivalent value. I am not a lawyer and I have neither the merit nor the right to enter into the hair-splitting arguments that are the lawyers, paradise; but as a layman I would like to know that how it is that there has to be this differentiation. Is it then that the provision of the U. P. Zamindari Bill has shown an intent to defraud, or that no compensation to be paid under its provisions? Why is it that the special provisions have to be made for the Zamindari Bills of U.P., Madras and Bihar? If it were that the lawyers who hold the view that the justiciability would not be challenged unless there was intent to defraud, were correct then it would not be necessary to include, Clauses (4) and (6). Shorn of all legal technicalities, as we can see it, the position really comes down to this, that it is not the Sovereign Parliament that has the last word, but it is the Court of Law that will have the last word in case of other properties except those covered by Clauses (4) and (6). I would like to ask what justice is there for this procedure? There are other fundamental justiciable rights, but even these rights are subject to the proviso that it is under the authority of law, e.g., the right of freedom of speech and expression, to assemble freely without arms, to form associations or unions — all have limitations, by which they come under the authority of Parliament. What is the justification in 1947 for us to place property on a very different basis? Pandit Nehru said in his speech this morning that the very conception of property is changing. The sacrosance attached to property is no longer there. Surely when we are deciding this issue today we must make it so that it is Parliament whose authority shall be supreme and that we shall not lay down a vested interest for all times.

It is quite true that Parliament sometimes does pass hasty legislations. Well we have the Second Chambers as Panditji pointed out this morning. Apart from that there is Clause (3) of this article which gives the President, i.e., the Central Government, final power as assent has to be given by the President before any such legislation comes in. I think the safeguards here are surely enough. It is not for us to include provisions whereby there can be various interpretations given by courts of law. If there can be various interpretations

amongst a few lawyers, even now just think of the varying interpretations that we shall have with different courts deciding differently. As I said before it will indeed become a lawyers paradise and litigation will become even more widespread.

Mr. President: You have made out that point.

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): There is no question of expropriation of property. The question of nationalisation or socialisation really does not arise today. These are issues that have been raised to confuse the matter. The Government has laid down its economic policy. That policy does not include any nationalisation or socialisation except in the case of the abolition of zamindari property.

Shrimati Durgabai (Madras: General): May I know from the speaker through you, Sir, whether it is her intention to oust the jurisdiction of the Court even when the compensation so fixed is fraudulent?

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): I say, who is to decide what is fraudulent? Is the Zamindari Bill of U.P. and the compensation fixed in it today fraudulent, and if that is not so, then why have we to make provision for an exemption Clause? Therefore, I say that it must be Parliament that must have the supreme voice in the matter, and it cannot be left to courts of law to challenge the decisions of Parliament even on the excuse that it is fraudulent. A court of law may decide that even paying half the value is fraudulent. There will be nothing to debar it unless this amendment is included.

Now, as I said, there has been confusion of issues. This question of expropriation of property has been brought up. There is no question of expropriation today, and even in the Parliament of tomorrow, I do not think that so long as there is a constitutional authority and so long as there is responsible government, there can ever be any question of expropriation of property, without paying compensation. Even those people who want a new economic structure and who believe in the gradual transformation of the present structure into a new economic structure where economic justice prevails, even they do not want that a new class of destitute or poor should be created. We do not want and the government of the future will not want to create a new liability for the State. Thus, neither the Parliament of today nor that of the future will expropriate property without compensation, because their object will be to bring about a reduction in the disparity of wealth and not to create new class who will become the concern of the State.

Mr. President: I hope you have finished now?

Shrimati Renuka Ray: I have just one or two more points.

Mr. President: More points or more words?

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): More points, Sir. Another point that has been raised in some of the speeches made today is that because of the economic difficulties of today it is essential for us to put this Clause in the draft. Mr. Himatsingka asked the question as to how production could be increased if you do not satisfy the capitalists on this point. I say, we have been making concession after concession to capitalists, and still production has not gone up so far. The question of capital for nation and of increased production is an urgent one today. Even if capitalists do not conform, we have to find ways and means towards this end. We cannot be at their mercy altogether if they do not play the game. But I fail to see what this Article has got to do with this. This is not a provision that is being incorporated in an Act of the legislature, but something we are considering in a permanent Constitution for the future.

Sir, before I conclude, I just want to point out that if we do not allow constitutional remedies, if we bind and fritter the future, then a time will come when extra-constitutional remedies will be resorted to, and when this Constitution will be treated as a scrap of paper.

Sir, before I conclude, I would appeal most particularly and most especially to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who, above all, believes in economic justice and social justice, to accept this amendment and substitute Clause (4) by my amendment. I appeal to the Drafting Committee that if they have any differences of opinion, then this makes it quite clear. If they believe that the provision does not mean justifiability, then what objection can they have to my amendment?

Last of all, I appeal to this House and say, let us not accept something which posterity may point to and say that, we were more interested, and concerned at all in entrenching vested interests in the Constitution, than all other rights. Let them not say that the right of property was the only fundamental right in which we showed most concern as only to it we gave a double assurance by the incorporation of Article 24 in this manner let us not forget that no other economic right is incorporated in Fundamental Rights — all others are on directives as pious hopes for the future.

#### **SUMMARISING THE WORK OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY: HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS**

Shrimati Renuka Ray (West Bengal: General): Mr. President, Sir, we are at last reaching the final stages of our Constitution-making, in three years. Three years, naturally, may appear to be a long time to frame a Constitution. But it must be borne in mind that since this Constituent Assembly first came into existence, swift-riding changes came in our country. With the partition of the country, the territorial orbit of the constitution-makers was circumscribed, while with the transfer of power, this House became a sovereign body, drawing up the constitution of a free country, and acting also in the dual role of Parliament. Thus the first seven months of its labour were largely wasted as changes had to be made. Much of the time of the Constituent Assembly was also spent in dealing with emergency situations and the day to day problems of



Parliament. Again, Sir, with the integration of the Indian States, even changes which were not contemplated a year ago had to be made. Sir, when this country was partitioned and provinces like my own province and the Punjab were dismembered, those who were not our friends thought and expected that the further Balkanisation of India was imminent. Who could have thought at that time, which of us conceived, that in two short years, all the Indian States, including Hyderabad, would become a composite parts of the co-ordinated whole, and that for the States and the Provinces in a common measure, we would be drawing up a Constitution for the entire Indian Union? Sir, living as we do in close proximity to these events that have taken place, it is difficult for us to realise the full significance of the bloodless revolution that has taken place and which stands as an eloquent testimony to the genius of Sardar Patel. I feel that it is only posterity that can give due appreciation to these events.

Sir, turning now to the Constitution, I must say that it is a very voluminous Constitution that we have drawn up. It is perhaps the most voluminous in the world today. I was one of those who had believed that it would have been better not to have entered into such a welter of details, but to have drawn up a Constitution on more general lines. Sir, a written Constitution, however, elastic, must, to a very large extent, be a rigid Constitution. It would have been better, I think, to have eliminated as far as possible rigidity, by not going into too many details. But the argument that held with this House was that we were concerned with numerous complex problems, that living conditions in this country differed so much and so widely that much detail was necessary. But for the life of me, I cannot understand why we had to go to such details as to put in the salaries of high dignitaries of the State, like the President and the salaries of Judges, in the Constitution. Why should the Constitution thus usurp what are really the normal duties of Parliament? Apart from any question of the amounts of salaries that have been put in, I should like to point out that in the modern world, where money is always changing in value, a sum of Rs. 5,000 today, may tomorrow be worth only 500 or 5. So in the Constitution what purpose can be served by prescribing the exact amount of the salaries?

Sir, turning to the Constitution as it stands, in broad outline, though there may be many flaws, and one very major transgression against the very objectives of our Preamble, I feel, on the whole, this Constitution can fulfil the objectives for which we have drawn it up.

It has after all been drawn up by men and women who represent this country but who belong to very diverse cultures, different outlooks, with varying ideas on many subjects and thus the Constitution had to be drawn up in common agreement and as a matter of compromise and therefore it may be said, though each of us individually may have much to say on a great many of the clauses, on the whole we have been able to achieve a measure of common agreement.

So far as the Fundamental Rights of this Constitution are concerned, I think in the case of the majority of them, if they are properly explained to our people,

there is nothing that will not win their approbation and the approval of all. I should like in particular to refer to one Fundamental Right which makes a tremendous difference and really does bring in equality: "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. ". This right

is a justiciable Fundamental Right today enforceable through courts of law, and if there are any laws, social and which remain as a contradiction to this principle of a justiciable right, those laws will have to be overridden.

It is very unfortunate that although the political rights are in these fundamental principles, the economic rights of citizens have not been able to be put in as justiciable rights today. Conditions in our country are such that it has not been possible for us at the present moment to have them as Fundamental Rights which are enforceable through courts of law. They have been put in as directives of State policy. Sir, it is also all the more unfortunate that among these directives of State policy are some to the most vital rights of citizens and along with them are lumped many matters of much lesser importance. At the same time, I do not think there is anything to despair because it is possible for the Parliament and the government of the future to bring these rights which are now directives as economic rights, and as Fundamental Right, in the near future.

Sir, the content of democracy is not political democracy alone, and although it is quite true that we have laid down a Constitution which with adult suffrage has brought political democracy to this country, it is equally true that this Constitution has not been able to provide as effectively as possible for the economic rights of the citizens, although there is no bar in attaining them.

I said a little while ago that there is one great flaw, one great transgression, in the Fundamental Rights which is a blot on this very Constitution. While every other economic right is in directives of States policy, the right to hold and acquire private property alone remains as the fundamental justiciable right. Not only is it there in Article 13(f) but it is further entrenched because of Article 31 of the Fundamental Rights. It is entrenched in such a manner that the Parliament of the day has not the final authority to even determine the amount and value of the compensation that has to be paid when property is acquired in the national interest.

Sir, the very exemptions that have been made in Article 31 show how firmly these rights are entrenched. These exemptions are in regard to zamindari property in certain provinces and even for these there is a time- limit. So that in the case of all other forms of property as well as in the case of zamindari property which cannot be legislated for in the prescribed time-limit, Parliament will have little voice. There was a great deal of confusion on this matter, I feel. There were many who seemed to think that if it was Parliament who had the final right to lay down the manner of compensation it may so happen that no

compensation at all would be paid. Sir, I am sure you will agree with me, and the House also will agree with me, that no constitutional authority could ever have laid down any such principles in which no compensation whatsoever was paid. Therefore, I consider that there was a great confusion of issues when this point was raised and I feel, and I would humbly submit, that many of us did not quite realise what we were doing when we allowed this Clause in the present form to be included in the Constitution.

Posterity may well say of us that here, we did try to lay down the economic structure of future times, for all time, perhaps there is only one compensation, one consolation that we can by amendment of the Constitution change this, and I am sure Sir, that very shortly it will be necessary to bring in such an amendment.

After all, a Constitution is but a paper document. It is the way in which it is worked that will determine its success or its failure. We are the framers of this Constitution and in our humble way, as a compromise amongst so many, we have done the best that we could have perhaps, although we must consider that there are many flaws left. But it is the architects who will actually implement this Constitution, who will give it life and breath, who will really determine in what manner it will be worked. It will be to them to make of it something worthy and worthwhile and also it may be that they can mar it, distort it, maim it and make those very fundamental principles and rights which are meant for the security of citizens be used in such a way as to bring about the detriment of the citizen. It is really the architects of this generation and the next we are going to put this Constitution into working, on whom will depend a great deal, its success or its failure. It is not for us to say whether we have done our job well or badly. There will be, as I have said, need for amendments which some of us feel must come in the near future. In the light of the experience of the working of this Constitution, there will be need for many other adaptations to bring it into conformity with and adapted to the needs of the genius of our race.

Sir, before I conclude, I should like to join with those who have expressed their gratitude to you for the fortitude and the patience and the sweet tolerance that you have shown to the Members of this House.

I would also like to express my thanks to the able members of the Drafting Committee and its Chairman, and particularly I should like to say a word about Mr. T.T. Krishnamachari who has put in as much effort and as much energy as this galaxy of brilliant lawyers amongst whom he has on more than one occasion brought to bear a humanising touch. Our deep gratitude is also due to Sir B.N. Rau, the Constitutional Adviser who without prejudice, explained legal intricacies to us and made them clear.

Sir, finally I would like to say that may it be given to us to be able to work this Constitution in this generation and in the generations to come, in such a manner,

that the lofty ideas that the Father of our Nation laid down, may indeed become a living reality for the people of this land. May Gandhian socialism be a practical contribution of this country to the world of man.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renuka\\_Ray](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renuka_Ray)

| Renuka Ray                      |                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha |                                                                                                                |
|                                 | In office<br>1957–1967                                                                                         |
| Preceded by                     | <a href="#">Surendra Mohan Ghose</a>                                                                           |
| Succeeded by                    | <a href="#">Uma Roy</a>                                                                                        |
| Constituency                    | <a href="#">Malda</a> , <a href="#">West Bengal</a>                                                            |
| Personal details                |                                                                                                                |
| Born                            | 4 January 1904<br><a href="#">Calcutta</a> , <a href="#">Bengal presidency</a> , <a href="#">British India</a> |
| Died                            | 11 April 1997 (aged 93)<br><a href="#">Malda</a> , <a href="#">West Bengal</a> , <a href="#">India</a>         |
| Political party                 | <a href="#">Indian National Congress</a>                                                                       |
| Parent                          | <a href="#">Satish Chandra Mukherjee</a>                                                                       |
| Awards                          | <a href="#">Padma Bhushan</a>                                                                                  |

Renuka Ray (4 January 1904 - 11 April 1997) was a noted freedom-fighter, social activist and politician of India.

She was a descendant of [Brahmo](#) reformer, [Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee](#), and daughter of [Satish Chandra Mukherjee](#), an ICS officer, and [Charulata Mukherjee](#), a social worker and member of the [All India Women's Conference](#). She was awarded the [Padma Bhushan](#) by the [Government of India](#) in 1988.

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## Sarojini Naidu

(13.02.1879 - 02.03.1949)

<https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/sarojini-naidu-indias-first-female-governor-and-freedom-icon-2679621-2025-02-13>

### Beyond poetry: Sarojini Naidu, India's first female governor and freedom icon

Sarojini Naidu wasn't just India's 'Nightingale'. She was a fierce freedom fighter, a trusted leader, and India's first female governor. She had a big role in shaping India's post-independence governance.



***Sarojini Naidu wasn't just a poet. She was a fierce freedom fighter, a trusted leader, and India's first female governor. (Photo: Getty Images; Naidu with Gandhi at Boulogne station, on the way to England to attend the Round Table Conference)***

Sarojini Naidu is known best as the 'Nightingale of India'. She was an excellent poet and many of us former CBSE students might fondly recall her colourful imagery in 'Bazaars of Hyderabad', included in the English curriculum.

But Naidu, born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad to a Bengali Brahmin family, was not just a poet but a fearless leader in India's independence struggle. She was a close ally of Mahatma Gandhi and played a crucial role in the 1942 Quit India Movement.

And not just that -- she was also independent India's first female governor. She served as the Governor of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) from 1947 to 1949, and helped shape post-independence governance with her leadership and vision.

### **SAROJINI NAIDU BEYOND POETRY: A FIREBRAND FREEDOM FIGHTER**

Sarojini Naidu's true impact stretched far beyond literature. She was a fearless activist, deeply involved in India's struggle for independence.

Arrested multiple times, she endured imprisonment, illness, and hardship -- all without losing her sharp wit and love for life.

Sushila Nayar, who was imprisoned alongside Naidu during the Quit India Movement in 1942, recalled her first encounter with the leader in an essay in 'Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance'.



**Sarojini Naidu during a lecture tour of America**

As a student, Nayar attended a lecture at the Constitution Club in Delhi, where Western speakers spoke about women's rights with a tone of superiority. When it was Naidu's

turn to speak, she cleverly turned the tables, reminding the audience that the concept of gender equality had long been a part of Indian traditions.

"Her speech drew thunderous applause," Nayar wrote, adding that she had "won the hearts of the student community."

### SAROJINI NAIDU AND GANDHI: A DYNAMIC FRIENDSHIP

Naidu shared a deep but complex relationship with Mahatma Gandhi. She was one of his most trusted allies, yet she never hesitated to challenge him when needed.

During their imprisonment at Aga Khan Palace in 1942, Naidu took on a maternal role in the camp. Gandhi affectionately called her "Amma Jan" (beloved mother).

According to Sushila Nayar, Naidu ensured that everyone was well-fed and in good spirits. Even in difficult conditions, she found ways to keep morale high, supervising cooking, making soups from vegetable peels, and even inaugurating a makeshift badminton court with Gandhi -- both of them struggling to hit the shuttlecock across the net.

Her health, however, suffered during imprisonment. She battled fever and severe diarrhoea but refused to leave when authorities considered releasing her on medical grounds.



**Sarojini Naidu, successor to Mahatma Gandhi and Abbas Naidu in India's Freedom movement, who was arrested and freed shortly after for attempting a salt run at Dharsaana, is seen here addressing a group of her followers at Chaupatty.**

She stayed to support Gandhi, especially during his 21-day fast, taking it upon herself to regulate visitors and protect him from exhaustion. She was finally released in March 1943, choosing to go home rather than to a hospital.

## SHAPING INDIA'S FIRST POST-INDEPENDENCE GOVERNMENT

After India's independence, Sarojini Naidu became India's first female governor, leading Uttar Pradesh in its earliest years as a newly formed state.

Naidu's years in the freedom struggle had sharpened her ability to bring people together and navigate difficult political landscapes. Her place was definitely not just symbolic.

Her governance style showed her deep-rooted nationalism, diplomacy, and warmth. While she was known for her poetry and humour, she was also firm in her convictions.

Just as she had challenged colonial authorities, she ensured that her role as governor was not just a ceremonial one but an active participation in shaping India's new governance.



**Lady Mountbatten (1901 - 1960) and Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the only woman member of the Inner cabinet of the National Congress of India having a chat.**



## A GLIMPSE INTO HER PERSONAL LIFE

Sarojini Naidu's personal life was just as unconventional as her political journey. In 1898, she married Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a South Indian physician, at a time when inter-caste marriages -- and love marriages -- were rare and often discouraged.

They had four children, including Padmaja Naidu, who became a freedom activist.

Their relationship was one of mutual respect, with Govindarajulu supporting her ambitions as a poet and a nationalist leader.

Despite her demanding public life, Naidu remained deeply connected to her family, often writing heartfelt letters to her children, blending humour, wisdom, and affection in every word.



**Sarojini Naidu at the head of a group of Indian volunteers going to a salt mine. On the far left is Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Gandhi.**

## LEGACY FOR TODAY'S LEADERS

Sarojini Naidu's life offers timeless lessons in leadership. She balanced activism with diplomacy, fierce resistance with humour, and governance with compassion. Perhaps there isn't any modern leader like her.

Her ability to stand firm in the face of adversity while maintaining an unbreakable spirit to today's leaders. Her belief in unity, gender equality, and the power of words continues to hold relevance today.

As India remembers her on her 146th birth anniversary, her legacy reminds us that leadership isn't just about power -- it's about heart, resilience, and the courage to fight for what is right.

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# Sarojini Naidu School of Arts & Communication

<https://snschool.uohyd.ac.in/>

The Sarojini Naidu School of Arts and Communication started functioning from 1988-89 and offers Masters-level courses in Dance, Theatre Arts, Fine Arts, and Communication and Doctoral (PhD) programmes in Communication, Theatre Arts, and Dance.

The University is indebted to the family of Sarojini Naidu for the bequest by the late Padmaja Naidu of the 'Golden Threshold', where the University started functioning. In recognition of this gesture, the University started this School by naming it after Sarojini Naidu to offer post- graduate and research programmes in the fields of arts and culture.

The School provides academic programmes in the Departments of Dance, Theatre Arts, Fine Arts, Communication and Music. It seeks to enlarge the scope of the academic programme so as to include other areas of artistic endeavour like music. The broad objective of the teaching programme is not only to explore the evolution and forms of arts, but also to bring about an integrated approach to the study of creativity. Apart from the core Faculty, experts in various fields and guest faculty of national and international repute teach courses in the school.

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**Sarojini Naidu Medical College, Agra**  
Ministry of Medical Education, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh

[https://www.snmcagra.ac.in/sarojini\\_naidu.html](https://www.snmcagra.ac.in/sarojini_naidu.html)



**S.N. Medical College**, Agra, named after the first lady Governess of Uttar Pradesh, poetess and freedom fighter, **Bharat Kokila Smt. Sarojini Naidu**, is situated in the heart of Agra, the famous old city of the Taj Mahal. It is one of the first three Medical Schools of the country.

For Agra Medical School, the year 1939 was a year of achievement. With a view to meet the growing demand for qualified doctors in the then United Provinces, the status of Agra Medical School was upgraded to that of a full-fledged Medical College affiliated to the Agra University for the award of M.B.B.S. degree.

Today, this college has completed over 60 years of its useful existence dedicated to the cause of Medical Education and Research and in the service of suffering humanity the college motto being '**LIVE TO SERVE**'.

This college, soon after its inception, was recognized by the Medical Council of India and the General Medical Council of Great Britain. The first of M.B.B.S. doctors passed out in the year 1944. The hospital attached to the Agra Medical School since 1854 was known as the Thompson Hospital. With the elevation of Agra Medical School to S. N. Medical College, the Thompson Hospital was also rechristened as S.N. Hospital.

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## National Women's Day Wishes 2025:

Celebrating Sarojini Naidu's Birth Anniversary and Her Legacy

<https://www.news18.com/lifestyle/national-womens-day-wishes-2025-celebrating-sarojini-naidus-birth-anniversary-and-her-legacy-9223105.html>



Sarojini Naidu was India's first female governor, leading Uttar Pradesh after independence.

**National Women's Day Wishes 2025:** India marks National Women's Day on February 13 to celebrate the legacy of Sarojini Naidu, fondly known as the Nightingale of India. A fearless leader and a gifted poet, Naidu played a crucial role in the country's freedom struggle and worked tirelessly for women's rights. Her birthday was chosen as National Women's Day to acknowledge the contributions of women in various fields and their role in shaping the nation's future.

Notably, she made history as India's first female governor, leading Uttar Pradesh after independence. She strongly advocated for women's education and political participation, inspiring generations.



## Happy National Women's Day Wishes

- Here's to strong women: May we know them, may we be them, and may we raise them. Happy National Women's Day.
- Happy National Women's Day to all the phenomenal women who make the world a better place with their kindness, compassion and resilience.
- On this National Women's Day, let's honour the extraordinary women who have paved the way for progress and equality. Here's to a future where every woman has the opportunity to thrive.
- To the women who inspire us with their strength, wisdom and grace: Happy National Women's Day. Your contributions to our lives and society are immeasurable.
- Here's to the women who lift each other, support one another and empower those around them. Happy National Women's Day.

### **Sarojini Naidu's Birth Anniversary 2025: 5 Inspirational Quotes by The Nightingale of India**

1. "We want deeper sincerity of motive, greater courage in speech and earnestness in action."
  2. "A country's greatness lies in its undying ideals of love and sacrifice that inspire the mothers of the race."
  3. "When there is oppression, the only self-respecting thing is to rise and say this shall cease today because my right is justice. If you are stronger, you have to help the weaker boy or girl both in play and in the work."
  4. "Till ye have battled with great grief and fears/And borne the conflict of dream-shattering years/Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife/Children, ye have not lived: for this is life."
- 
5. "Life is a song, sing it. Life is a game, play it. Life is a challenge, meet it. Life is a dream, realise it. Life is a sacrifice, offer it. Life is love, enjoy it."

### **National Women's Day History**

Born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad, Sarojini Naidu was deeply influenced by her parents—her father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, was a scientist, and her mother, Varada Sundari Devi, was a poet.

Inspired by literature from an early age, she developed a passion for writing poetry and became widely recognized for her work, earning the title "Nightingale of India." Her poetry beautifully captured India's rich heritage, love for the nation, and the struggles of its people.

Beyond being a poet, Naidu was a powerful political leader. She joined the Indian National Congress, speaking against British rule and actively participating in the freedom movement.

Despite being arrested several times, she remained committed to the cause. She also represented India on international platforms, using her eloquence and leadership to advocate for India's independence.

**National Women's Day Significance**

National Women's Day not only celebrates Sarojini Naidu's contributions but also highlights the importance of women's empowerment. It serves as a reminder of the need for equal opportunities in education, employment, and politics. Women across India have broken barriers and excelled in multiple fields, proving that talent and perseverance are stronger than gender biases.

As we honour Sarojini Naidu today, we also celebrate the progress of women in India and reaffirm our commitment to gender equality and empowerment.



**Dr Sarojni Naidu International Award  
for Working Women**

<https://studios566.wordpress.com/2024/10/23/the-8th-edition-of-the-dr-sarojini-naidu-international-award-for-working-women-celebrates-women-leaders-from-across-the-globe/>

**The 8th Edition of the Dr. Sarojni Naidu International  
Award for Working Women Celebrates Women Leaders  
from Across the Globe**



**The 8th Edition of the Dr. Sarojini Naidu International Award for Working Women Celebrates Women Leaders from Across the Globe.**

**Noida, India** – The 8th Edition of the prestigious **Dr. Sarojini Naidu International Award for Working Women** was celebrated with grandeur at Marwah Studios, Noida Film City, honoring the contributions of 100 outstanding women from India and around the world. The event, supported by the Asian Academy of Arts, AFT University, the International Chamber of Media and Entertainment Industry, and the International Women’s Forum, highlighted the critical role women play in shaping society and uplifting the global economy.

The ceremony saw the conferral of awards to women across diverse fields, including business, art, culture, fashion, law, media, cinema, management, administration, poetry, writing, science, research, event management, education, and social work. Each awardee stood as a beacon of excellence, with their unique achievements reflecting dedication, innovation, and an unrelenting commitment to societal betterment.

The event was graced by distinguished guests of honor, Her Excellency Dr. Capaya Rodriguez G, the Ambassador of Venezuela to India, and Her Excellency Adv. Lebohlang Valentine Mochaba, the High Commissioner of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Both dignitaries

received special honors, recognizing their leadership and diplomatic contributions. In her address, Dr. Capaya Rodriguez G expressed her gratitude, commending the efforts of Dr. Sandeep Marwah in championing women from all walks of life. Adv. Lebohang Valentine Mochaba emphasized the importance of strengthening bilateral relations between India and Lesotho, adding that women’s empowerment stands as a shared value between nations.

Dr. Sandeep Marwah, Founder of Noida Film City and President of the Sarojni Naidu Awards, delivered an inspiring keynote speech, urging continued support for women in all sectors. He recognized the invaluable contributions of modern women, not only in professional fields but also in community building and social reform. Dr. Marwah spoke about the range of women’s empowerment programs at Marwah Studios and reaffirmed his commitment to fostering environments where women can lead and thrive.

“These remarkable women are the backbone of our society, and their leadership, vision, and determination inspire us all to dream bigger and work harder,” Dr. Marwah declared. “We are committed to providing platforms that recognize and amplify their voices.”

The event culminated with the recognition of 100 notable women, whose excellence spans across sectors and industries. Among the awardees were prominent leaders such as: Dr. Alka Bhargava, Anchal Puri, Anita Barar, Dr. Anjali Bharti, Prof. Anju Bali Pandey, Dr. Ankita Raj, Anu k Manhotra, Dr. Anubha Pundir, Arpana Yadav, Astha Gill, Babita Khanna, Bandana Singh, BK Prabha Mishra, Brijesh Kumari, Chanchal Gupta, Chhavi Mehta, Coach Madhulika Sharma, Damini Grover, Dr. Deepa Dass, Devika Das, Dishi Bhatnagar, Erum Khan, Faryal Shadab, HE Dr.Capaya Rodriguez G, HE. Adv. Lebohang Valentine Mochaba, Himani Aggarwal, Huma Siddiqui, Indu Rani Singh

These exemplary women are living testaments to the power of perseverance, leadership, and social impact. Their collective efforts have created a ripple effect, inspiring countless others to pursue their passions and work towards societal progress.

The 8th Edition of the Dr. Sarojni Naidu International Award continues to build upon a legacy of honoring women leaders, with a vision to create a world where women are empowered to break barriers, lead innovation, and foster inclusive growth.



## Sarojini Naidu’s Notable Literary Works

<https://www.nextias.com/blog/sarojini-naidu/>

**Sarojini Naidu’s** literary legacy is marked by a collection of works that beautifully capture the essence of Indian culture, landscapes, and the spirit of its freedom struggle. Her initial works showcased an emotional depth, along with a vivid portrayal of Indian landscapes and life. Her involvement in the national movement influenced her writing, and her poetry began to reflect a stronger sense of nationalism and a subtle critique of colonial rule. Over time, her poetry also began to address social and political issues more directly, particularly those concerning women’s rights and **women empowerment**.



### The major literary works of Sarojini Naidu include the following:

- **The Golden Threshold:** This was Sarojini Naidu's first collection of poems. This was published in 1905 and is named after her family home in Hyderabad.
- **The Bird of Time:** Published in 1912, this collection features patriotic pieces that reflect Naidu's deep love for her country.
- **The Broken Wing:** This collection is known for including one of the most famous poems of Naidu "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad".
- **The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India:** This anthology of Naidu's poems was published after her death and includes verses that artfully weave the essence of Indian tradition with the English language.
- **The Feather of The Dawn:** Published in 1961, this was edited by her daughter Padmaja Naidu. This collection comprises previously unpublished poems by Sarojini Naidu.

Apart from the above-listed one, her literary works include many other notable poems. Celebrated for their lyrical beauty and patriotic fervor her poems remain a testament to her enduring legacy as "The Nightingale of India."

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### Political Activism of Sarojini Naidu

During her time, the nationalistic fervor and growing demand for freedom from British rule were sweeping across India. All these deeply influenced Naidu and she ventured into the Indian freedom movement. Along with making her poetry a powerful medium of propagating nationalism, she took active participation in several movements organized during her time.



### Some of the notable involvement and contributions of Sarojini Naidu in the Freedom Struggle are listed below:

- **Influence of Gopal Krishna Gokhale:** Gopal Krishna Gokhale played a crucial role in drawing Sarojini Naidu closer to the freedom movement. Inspired by his ideals and dedication, Naidu decided to dedicate her life to the cause of India's independence.
- **Anti-Partition Movement:** She formally joined the Indian national movement during the anti-partition of Bengal in 1905.

- **Meeting with Mahatma Gandhi:** Her encounter with Mahatma Gandhi further enhanced her engagement in India’s Freedom Struggle. Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience deeply resonated with her, and she became one of his closest associates and supporters.
- **Participation in Non-Cooperation Movement:** Naidu took an active part in the Non-Cooperation Movement launched in 1920.
  - She was arrested several times during the Non-Cooperation Movement.
- **Role in the Indian National Congress:** In recognition of her role in the Indian independence movement, Naidu was appointed as the **President of the Indian National Congress in Kanpur Session 1925**.
  - She was the **first Indian woman** and **overall the second woman** (after Annie Besant) to serve as the President of the Indian National Congress.
  - Her presidency marked a significant milestone in recognizing the role of women in the Indian independence movement.
- **Participation in Civil Disobedience and Salt Satyagraha:** Naidu played a pivotal role in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Salt Satyagraha of 1930. She led the Dharasana Satyagraha after Gandhi’s arrest, showcasing her courage to face colonial repression.
- **Second Round Table Conference:** Naidu accompanied Gandhi to London for the second Round Table Conference held in 1931.
- **Participation in Quit India Movement:** Sarojini Naidu registered her participation in Quit India Movement launched in 1942 as well.
- **Advocacy for Women’s Rights:** Naidu is known for championing the cause of women’s rights in India. She saw the national movement as an opportunity for women to showcase their strength and hence advocated for women’s active participation in the freedom struggle.
- **Advocacy Abroad:** Naidu travelled to different countries to mobilize international support for India’s freedom struggle.
  - She also represented India at various international forums, where she advocated for the Indian independence movement and women’s rights.

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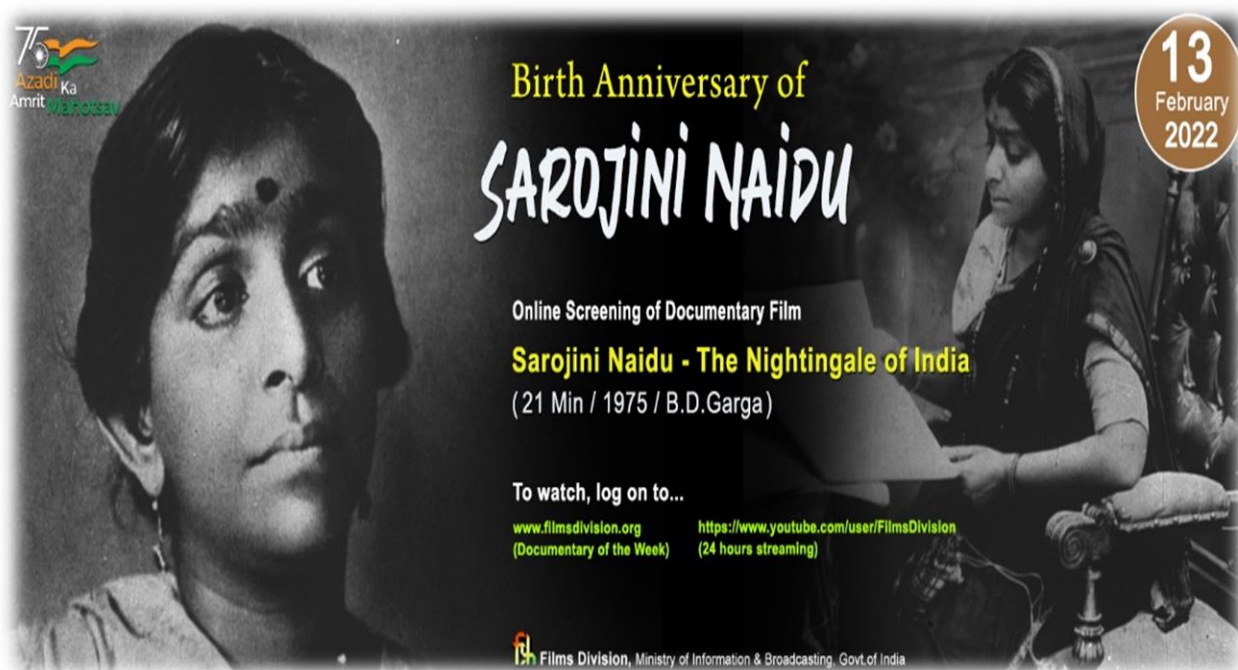
# Films Division pays tribute to Sarojini Naidu on her 143rd birth anniversary

<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1798024>

## Biopic to be streamed as a tribute to Sarojini Naidu

Posted On: 13 FEB 2022 12:19PM by PIB Mumbai

Films Division is paying tribute to Sarojini Naidu, a doyen of Indian Independence movement, famously called as 'Nightingale of India/ Bharat Kokila', on her 143<sup>rd</sup> birth anniversary on 13 February, 2022. A biopic on her will be streamed on FD website and YouTube channel to mark the occasion. This screening is a part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' celebration by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India.



The documentary **Sarojini Naidu - The Nightingale of India** (1975/B.D. Garga), throws light on the versatile personality who was a great freedom fighter, poet and the first women Governor of an Indian state. More importantly, the film has Sarojini Naidu's voice, addressing the Asian Relations Conference.

Please visit <https://filmsdivision.org/> and click @ "Documentary of the Week" or follow Films Division YouTube

Channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/FilmsDivision> to watch the film.

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## BIOGRAPHY

### Early Life:

Sucheta Kripalani was born in Ambala (Punjab) in June 1908. She completed her education at [Indraprastha College](#), Delhi University. Kripalani began her professional career as a teacher of Constitutional History at [Banaras Hindu University](#) till 1939. In 1936, she married Acharya Kripalani, a Congress party member and a prominent freedom fighter. She became a [member](#) of the [Congress Party](#) in 1938 and served as the Secretary, for one and half years, to the Foreign Department and Women's Section.

### Role in India's Independence Movement:

Kripalani actively [participated](#) in the Indian independence movement in the 1940s. That included her [involvement](#) in the 1942 Quit India movement- she evaded arrest from the Government, although she was eventually arrested in 1944 and was detained for a year.

### Contribution to Constitution Making:

In 1946, Kripalani was [elected](#) to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces. She was a member of the [Flag Presentation Committee](#), which presented the first Indian Flag before the Constituent Assembly.

### Later Contributions:

As a staunch Gandhian, she [accompanied](#) Gandhi to Bengal during the Indian partition riots. Kripalani played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of refugees during the Partition of India: she [served](#) as a Secretary to the Relief and Rehabilitation Committee set up by the Congress Party.

Kripalani was one of the first few women parliamentarians in independent India. She was the [member](#) of Provincial Parliament (1950-52); First Lok Sabha (1952-56) and Second Lok Sabha (1957-62).

She had a successful [political career](#) in Uttar Pradesh and held important profiles including Member of Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly (1943-50) and Minister of Labour, Community Development and Industry, (1960-1963). Kripalani was elected



on the Congress party ticket to become Chief Minister of the state, giving her the distinction of being the first female Chief Minister of an Indian State. She served the office from October 1963 to March 1967.

Kripalani was a part of [several delegations](#) to foreign countries and organizations. She played a key role in Parliamentary Delegation to Turkey (1954); [International Labour Organization](#) (1961), [United Nations General Assembly](#) (1949); and the United Nations Seminar on Civic Responsibility and Increased Participation of Asian Women in Public Life (1956). She passed away in 1974.

#### Key Writings:

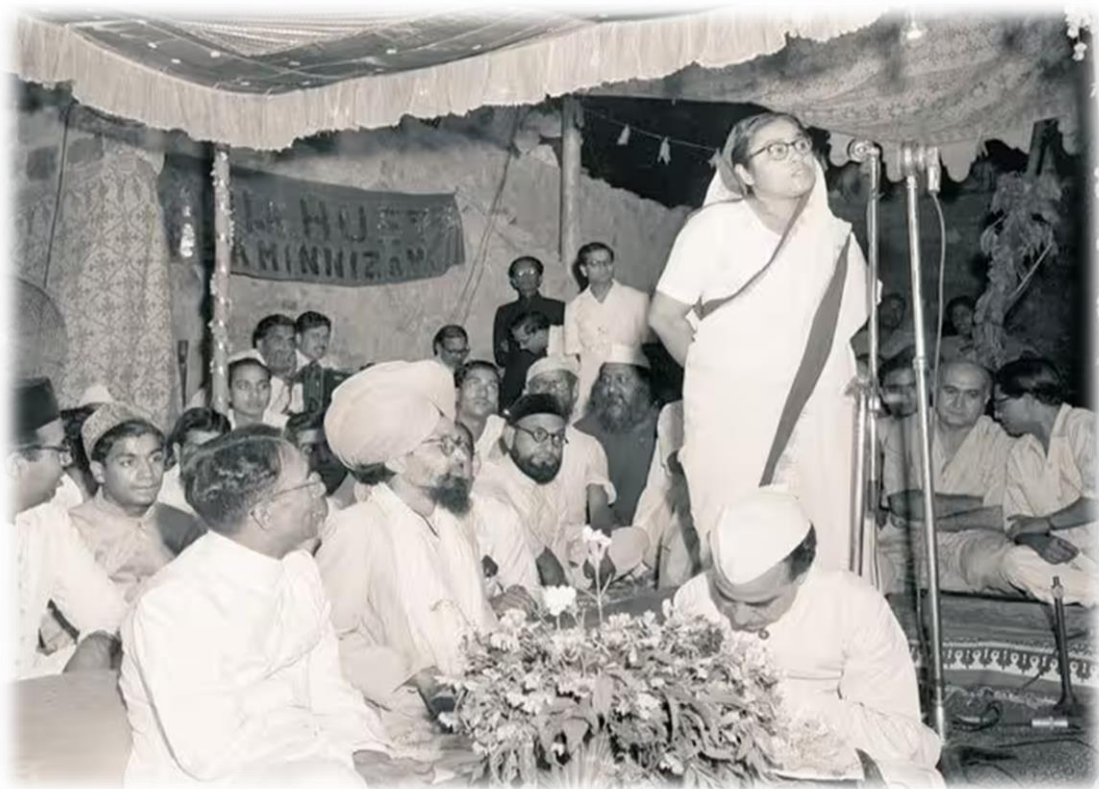
Kripalani authored [Sucheta: An Unfinished Autobiography](#) which recounts her life up to 1947.

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## Sucheta Kripalani

### First Female Chief Minister of India

<https://www.india.com/women/do-you-know-about-sucheta-kripalani-first-female-chief-minister-of-india-who-was-a-freedom-fighter-and-a-woman-of-rare-courage-7006961/>



The newly elected government is the hottest topic of conversation for the week. With few days of the election result and oath taking ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third consecutive term, majority of the citizens turned analysts are debating

about the potential consequences of the new government. While people are also discussing the number of women as ministers and pondering about the chief ministers, we thought of the first ever woman chief minister of India. Sucheta Kripalani, a freedom fighter, a remarkable politician, social activist, was the first woman to become the Chief Minister and that too of the state with largest number of constituencies – Uttar Pradesh.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, Sucheta Kripalani was “a person of rare courage and character who brought credit to Indian womanhood.”

### All About Sucheta Kripalani

Born in 1908 in Ambala, Sucheta Kripalani came from a family of social reformers and revolutionaries. According to the data on government site, “She was the daughter of Surendranath Majumdar, a government doctor who was also a zealous patriot who had dedicated his life to the service of the nation.” She received her undergraduate education at Indraprastha College in New Delhi and completed her Masters at St. Stephen’s College. As a young woman, Sucheta was deeply involved in the Indian independence movement. She participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and was imprisoned multiple times for her political activities.

Navigating as a woman in a patriarchal world, Kripalani eventually joined the Indian National Congress (INC) party and helmed the All-India Mahila Congress. In one of her older interviews, she reportedly said, “Thousands of women have participated in the various struggles of the Congress, but women had not been properly organised so far, and there was no woman’s organisation, parallel to, or as part of, the Congress’s organisation.”

She was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1946, where she played a key role in drafting the Indian Constitution. In 1952, she was elected to the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly and went on to serve as a minister in the state government.

### Meet Sucheta Kripalani, First Woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh

In 1963, Kripalani made history when she was elected as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, becoming the first woman to hold this position in India. It was great feat achieved by Kripalani given that there were only a handful of women in politics at that time. Her tenure was marked by her strong administrative skills and her commitment to addressing the needs of the common people.

Kripalani’s life and work continue to inspire women in India and around the world, serving as a shining example of women’s leadership and political empowerment.

Sucheta Kripalani’s story is a testament to the power of determination, courage, and a deep commitment to public service. Her groundbreaking achievement as the first woman Chief Minister of an Indian state paved the way for greater representation and participation of women in Indian politics.

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# 25 June 2024

<https://pwonlyias.com/sucheta-kriplani-jayanti-2024/>

*On June 25, 2024, India will celebrate the birth anniversary of Sucheta Kriplani, a remarkable leader whose contributions have left an indelible mark on the nation's history.*



On June 25, 2024, India will celebrate the birth anniversary of **Sucheta Kriplani**, a remarkable leader whose contributions have left an indelible mark on the nation's history. **Sucheta Kriplani Birth Anniversary 2024** serves as an opportunity to reflect on her unwavering commitment to the country's freedom struggle, and her pioneering role in Indian politics.

## About Sucheta Kriplani

Born on June 25, 1908, **Sucheta Kriplani** was not just a [freedom fighter](#) but also a pioneering politician whose contributions have left an indelible mark on Indian history. She was the first woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and played a significant role in India's independence movement, embodying courage and leadership in the nation's history.

## Sucheta Kriplani Jayanti 2024

**Sucheta Kriplani Jayanti**, will celebrated on June 25th, honors the legacy of a pioneering [Indian freedom fighter](#) and politician. As we commemorate the **Sucheta**

**Kriplani Jayanti 2024** on June 25, it is a fitting moment to reflect on the life and legacy of one of India's most remarkable leaders.

### Sucheta Kriplani Biography

**Early Life and Education:** Sucheta Kriplani was born in Ambala, Punjab, into a well-educated Bengali family. Her father, S.N. Majumdar, was a government doctor, and her mother was a homemaker. She completed her education at Indraprastha College and later graduated from the University of Delhi with a degree in history.

### Sucheta Kriplani's Role in Freedom Struggle and Independence Movement

Sucheta Kriplani's entry into the political arena was during a time of great upheaval in India. She got married to Acharya Kripalani, a freedom fighter and member of the Congress party, in 1936. In 1938, she joined the Congress Party and worked as the Foreign Department and Women's Section Secretary.

Her deep commitment to [Gandhian principles](#) was evident in her participation in the [Quit India Movement](#) of 1942. Kripalani was chosen to represent the United Provinces in the Constituent Assembly in 1946. She was a part of the panel that presented the inaugural Indian flag to the [Constituent Assembly](#).

### Political Career Post-Independence

After India gained independence in 1947, Sucheta Kriplani continued to play a vital role in the nation's political landscape. She was elected to the Constituent Assembly, where she contributed to the [framing of the Indian Constitution](#). She served as a member of the Provincial Parliament from 1950 to 1952, the First Lok Sabha during 1952–56, and the Second Lok Sabha from 1957 to 1962.

Her eloquence, intelligence, and dedication to public service made her a respected figure in the [Lok Sabha](#). However, it was her election as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1963 that marked a significant milestone in her career. Sucheta Kriplani became the first woman to hold the office of Chief Minister in any Indian state, breaking new ground for [women in Indian politics](#).

### Achievements of Sucheta Kriplani as Chief Minister

The former CM Sucheta Kriplani served the office from October 1963 till March 1967. During her tenure as Chief Minister, Sucheta Kriplani focused on improving the state's infrastructure, education, and healthcare systems. She worked tirelessly to promote social justice and uplift the underprivileged sections of society. Her administration was marked by efforts to reduce corruption and improve governance, setting high standards for future leaders.

One of her notable achievements was the successful resolution of a prolonged strike by state employees in 1967. Kripalani was also a part of several international



delegations such as the Parliamentary Delegation to Turkey in 1954, the International Labour Organization in 1961, United Nations General Assembly in 1949.



Wrapping Up!

Sucheta Kriplani’s legacy extends beyond her political achievements. She was a trailblazer who paved the way for women in Indian politics, inspiring generations of women to take active roles in public life. Her dedication to Gandhian principles, her commitment to social justice, and her unwavering patriotism continue to inspire Indians today.

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Kindly visit the Web Link:

**The incredible tale of Sucheta Kripalani | She Left a Legacy**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-c5LmiQias> [20:05]

Sucheta Kripalani was a woman who redefined leadership in a country on the cusp of transformation. She was a freedom fighter who went on to become the country’s first female chief minister. From the chaos of the freedom struggle to the order of governance, her story is a testament to courage, resilience, and grit. In the third episode of this series, we discuss the incredible story of her life and her various contributions to the country.

Sucheta Kripalani



Kriplani in 1960

4th [Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh](#)

In office

2 October 1963 – 13 March 1967

Preceded by [Chandra Bhanu Gupta](#)

Succeeded by [Chandra Bhanu Gupta](#)

[Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha](#)

In office

[1967](#)–1971

Preceded by N. Dandekar

Succeeded by [Anand Singh](#)

Constituency [Gonda, Uttar Pradesh](#)

In office

[1951](#)–1961

Preceded by *constituency established*

Succeeded by [Balraj Madhok](#)

Constituency [New Delhi, Delhi](#)

[Member](#) of [Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly](#)

In office

1962–1967

Member of [Constituent Assembly of India](#)

In office

9 December 1946 – 24 January 1950

Personal details

Born 25 June 1908  
[Ambala](#), [Punjab](#), [British India](#)  
(present-day [Haryana](#), India)

|                                                                                                               |                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Died</b>                                                                                                   | 1 December 1974 (aged 66)<br><a href="#">New Delhi</a> , India |
| <b>Political party</b>                                                                                        | <a href="#">Indian National Congress</a>                       |
| <b>Spouse</b>                                                                                                 | <a href="#">J. B. Kripalani</a><br>(m. 1938)                   |
| <b><a href="#">Alma mater</a></b>                                                                             | <a href="#">University of Delhi</a>                            |
| <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sucheta_Kripalani">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sucheta_Kripalani</a> |                                                                |

**Sucheta Kripalani** (*née* **Majumdar**) (Bengali pronunciation: [ʃutʃeta]; 25 June 1908 – 1 December 1974) was an Indian **freedom fighter** and politician. She was **India's** first female **Chief Minister**, serving as the head of the **Uttar Pradesh** government from 1963 to 1967.

### Early life

She was born in **Ambala, Punjab** (now in **Haryana**) into a **Bengali Brahmo** family. Her father Surendranath Majumdar, worked as a **medical officer**, a job that required many transfers. As a result, she attended a number of **schools**, her final **degree** is a Master's in **History** from **St. Stephen's College, Delhi**.

This was a time when the country's **atmosphere** was charged with **nationalist** sentiments and the **freedom** struggle was gaining momentum.

She was a shy child, self-conscious about her appearance and intellect, as she points out in her book, **An Unfinished Autobiography**. It was the age she grew up in and the situations she faced that shaped her personality. Sucheta recounts how, as a 10-year-old, she and her siblings had heard their father and his friends talk about the **Jallianwala Bagh** massacre. It left them so outraged that they vented their anger on some of the **Anglo-Indian children** they played with, by calling them names.

She studied at **Indraprastha College** and **Punjab University** before becoming a professor of Constitutional History at **Banaras Hindu University**. In 1936, she married **J. B. Kripalani**, a prominent figure of the **Indian National Congress**, who was twenty years her senior. The marriage was opposed by both families, as well as by **Gandhi** himself, although he eventually relented.

### Freedom movement and independence

Like her contemporaries **Aruna Asaf Ali** and **Usha Mehta**, she came to the forefront during the **Quit India Movement** and was arrested by British. She later worked closely with **Mahatma Gandhi** during the **Partition** riots. She accompanied him to **Noakhali** in 1946.

She was one of the few women who were elected to the Constituent Assembly of India. She was elected as the first woman CM of state of Uttar Pradesh from the Kanpur constituency and was part of the subcommittee that drafted the **Indian Constitution**. She became a part of the subcommittee that laid down the charter for the constitution of India. On 14 August 1947, she sang **Vande Mataram** in the

Independence Session of the Constituent Assembly a few minutes before [Nehru](#) delivered his famous "[Tryst with Destiny](#)" speech. She was also the founder of the All India Mahilla Congress, established in 1940.

### After independence



**Kripalani with (from left to right) Ulla Lindström, Barbara Castle, Cairine Wilson and Eleanor Roosevelt in 1949.**

After independence, she remained involved with politics. For the [first Lok Sabha](#) elections in 1952, she contested from [New Delhi](#) on a [KMPP](#) ticket: she had joined the short-lived party founded by her husband the year before. She defeated the Congress candidate [Manmohini Sahgal](#). Five years later, she was reelected from the same constituency, but this time as the Congress candidate. She was elected one last time to the Lok Sabha in 1967, from [Gonda constituency](#) in Uttar Pradesh.

Meanwhile, she had also become a member of the [Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly](#). From 1960 to 1963, she served as Minister of Labour, Community Development and Industry in the UP government. In October 1963, she became the [Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh](#), the [first](#) woman to hold that position in any Indian state. The highlight of her tenure was the firm handling of a state employees strike. This first-ever strike by the state employees continued for 62 days. She relented only when the employees' leaders agreed to compromise. Kripalani kept her reputation as a firm administrator by refusing their demand for a pay hike.

When Congress split in 1969, she left the party with Morarji Desai faction to form NCO. She lost 1971 election as NCO candidate from [Faizabad \(Lok Sabha constituency\)](#). She retired from politics in 1971 and remained in seclusion till her death in 1974.

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## Vijayalakshmi Pandit

(18.08.1900 - 1.12.1990)

### 1st Woman President of the United Nations General Assembly VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT

In 1953, the United Nations elected India's Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit as the 8th President of the General Assembly, the first woman elected to the role.

A prominent politician and active Indian nationalist, she was also the first Indian woman to hold a cabinet position in pre-independent India. As newly-independent India's top diplomat, Pandit served as ambassador to the Soviet Union (1947-49), the United States and Mexico (1949-51), Ireland (1955-61), and Spain (1958-61), and high commissioner to the United Kingdom (1955-61). In 1979, she was appointed India's representative to the UN Human Rights Commission. Pandit was an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College.

Utilizing material from the UN Audiovisual Library, this production offers a captivating glimpse into the pivotal moment when Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit took the podium for her inaugural speech. She conveyed a message of preserving and preventing threats to peace, emphasizing the importance of women's roles in the United Nations, and highlighting the urgent need for international cooperation during a time of global challenges.

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## Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: A Biography

<https://carnegieendowment.org/events/2024/06/vijaya-lakshmi-pandit-a-biography?lang=en>

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was one of India's leading voices in world affairs. A pioneering policymaker, stateswoman, and diplomat, she paved the way for women in many fields across the globe. As a prominent politician, she was India's first woman cabinet minister. Her extraordinary international achievements encompass her being India's first ambassador to the United Nations (UN), the first ambassador to the Soviet Union, and the first woman elected as the president of the UN General Assembly. Inarguably, the journey of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit is interwoven with that of India's history in the twentieth century.

What imprint did she have on India's national movement? And what were her contributions toward Indian foreign policy post-independence? Relatedly, what does Madam Pandit's international life tell us about India's relationship with the world?

Carnegie India hosted Manu Bhagavan for a Security Studies Seminar on his book, *Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: A Biography*.

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

**Women and International Human Rights:** Participants discussed Vijay Lakshmi Pandit’s role in shaping the discourse around equitable rights for women and people of color. She opposed a traditional political system, arguing that a conservative space can lead to systemic discrimination of women and their exclusion from the political landscape. She directed her efforts toward empowering women and remedying the imbalance in their political representation. Participants noted Madame Pandit’s remarkable work on shaping the discourse around women’s rights, particularly by enabling conversations about the issue of unpaid labor. They also discussed how Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit’s insistence on anti-racism and equal rights informed her conceptualization of Indian foreign policy. Advocating against South Africa’s discriminatory laws against Indians, she issued a strongly worded resolution against non-discrimination at the UN. Furthermore, her stance against fascism and appeasement laid the foundation for the UN’s support for the cause of India’s independence.

**Madam Pandit’s Political Thinking:** Vijay Lakshmi Pandit represented India at the global stage and contributed toward conceptualizing a foreign policy for the country after independence. Participants discussed how her association with Jawaharlal Nehru, M. K. Gandhi, Morarji Desai, and Indira Gandhi, coupled with her own diplomatic engagements, shaped her political beliefs. She was often described as a corrective influence on Prime Minister Nehru’s impulses. Participants noted that her personal interactions with Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai helped her gauge China’s intentions with respect to India, which served to inform Prime Minister Nehru’s evaluation of China. Participants also highlighted that Madame Pandit was undeterred while voicing her disagreement with other leaders. She returned from retirement during the tense political time of the 1970s to oppose the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi.

**Shaping India’s Relationship with the World:** Vijay Lakshmi Pandit’s works in the form of letters, memos, speeches, and several experiential books have been subdued in history. Participants explained that although these writings haven’t been regarded as pieces of intellectual thought, they are crucial to understanding her worldview and perspectives on issues relevant to countries with a colonial history. She took strong positions on international platforms on matters concerning post-colonial countries and voiced India’s stance on national and global issues. Participants remarked that Madam Pandit’s reinforcement of the Atoms for Peace Speech, delivered by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and her remarks supporting Nelson Mandela on human rights issues at the United Nations demonstrate her advocacy. She insisted on the importance of the UN and recognized its responsibility as the “trustee of the future and architects of the new world.”

*This summary has been prepared by Vrinda Sahai, a research and program intern at Carnegie India.*

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[01] Kindly visit the Web Link to see 90+ photos/pictures

<https://www.gettyimages.in/search/2/image?phrase=vijaya+lakshmi+pandit>

[02] Kindly visit the Web Link to a Conversation

### **IN CONVERSATION - VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmFZoGSPi6o> [27:13]

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1900–1990) was an Indian diplomat and politician. She was the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit served as the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly (1953–1954) and later as India's ambassador to the United States and the Soviet Union. She played a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy and was a prominent figure in the international arena. Her diplomatic career and contributions to Indian politics mark her as a trailblazer for women in both fields. Rajiv Mehrotra has been a pioneering Television anchor & reporter in India. Over several decades from the early 1970s into the 2000's, he was host to various programmes on India's public service television channel – Doordarshan. This included a series of in-depth Conversations in many avatars that featured the best Indian minds and several global personalities. It was the most watched programme of its genre. Many of them are now available online. His documentary films won more than three hundred global awards, including thirty-three since 1986 from five Indian Presidents. His books have been published globally in 50+ languages and editions. He was elected a Judge of the Templeton Prize for Scientific & Spiritual Curiosity and a Global Leader for Tomorrow by the World Economic Forum at Davos. Rajiv was educated at the Universities of Delhi, Oxford & Columbia. Today Rajiv serves as the Secretary & Trustee of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of HH The Dalai Lama, established with the Nobel Peace Prize. He has been a student of His Holiness for more than forty years.

[03] Kindly visit the Web Link for a Brief Biography

**Biography of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 1st woman to be elected  
as president of the UN General Assembly**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_G7kd-wTtPE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_G7kd-wTtPE) [18:04]

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## **Advice from Mahatma Gandhi**

[https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/vijaya\\_lakshmi\\_pandit.php](https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/vijaya_lakshmi_pandit.php)

### **The Best Advice I Ever Had**

- Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit\*

The Best advice I ever had come from one of the greatest souls the world has ever known - Mahatma Gandhi - on a sunny afternoon a decade ago. Most people pass through a period of anguish when their belief in humanity is at a low ebb. I was in such a period. My husband had recently died. My deep sorrow over his loss was

followed by the humiliating realization that in the eyes of Indian Law I had no individual existence.

Now as a widow without a son, I was not entitled to any share of the family property, nor were my two daughters. I resented this galling position. I was bitter towards those members of my family who supported this antiquated law. At this time I went to pay my respects to Gandhiji and say good bye before leaving for America to take part in a conference. After our talk he asked "Have you made your peace with your relatives?"

I was amazed that he would take sides against me. "I have not quarrelled with anyone", I replied, "but I refuse to have anything to do with those who take advantage of an outworn law to create a difficult and humiliating situation for me."

Gandhiji looked out of the window for a moment. Then he turned to me and smiled and said, "You will go and say good-bye because courtesy and decency demand this. In India, we still attach importance to these things."

"No," I declared, "not even to please you will I go to those who wish to harm me."

"No one can harm you except yourself," he said, still smiling. "I see enough bitterness in your heart to cause you injury unless you check it." I remained silent, and he continued: "You are going to a new country because you are unhappy and want to escape. Can you escape from yourself? Will you find happiness outside when there is bitterness in your heart? Think it over. Be a little humble. You have lost a loved one—that is sorrow enough. Must you inflict further injury on yourself because you lack courage to cleanse your own heart?"

His words would not leave me. They gave me no peace. After some days of severe struggle with myself, I finally telephoned my brother-in-law. I would like to see him and the family, I said, before leaving.

I hadn't been with them five minutes before I sensed that my visit had brought a feeling of relief to everyone. I told them of my plans and asked for their good wishes before starting on this new stage of my life. The effect on me was miraculous. I felt as if a great burden had been lifted and was free to be myself. This small gesture was the beginning of a significant change in me.

Recently something happened to me. My guests of honour, the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Lady Eden could hardly have been more important to me. As High Commissioner for India in the United Kingdom, I had planned everything meticulously, from the menu to the colour scheme of the flowers and the candles. When the guests had arrived and drinks had been passed twice, I signalled the butler to announce



dinner. But still we waited. When for the third time drinks came round I excused myself and ran downstairs to the kitchen.

It presented a shocking sight. In one corner stood a frightened little kitchen maid, in another the housekeeper. At the table sat my cook, waving a ladle and singing, beating time with his foot. His eyes were glazed and he was far away in some other sphere. The table was littered with pieces of chicken.

My knees felt too weak to support me, but I asked in as normal a voice as I could command: "Why isn't the dinner ready?"

"But it is ready, Madame," my cook chanted. "All ready. Everybody sit down, sit down....."

I was furious. It was on the tip of my tongue to say. "Get out. You're dismissed!" when I thought of the counsel that had calmed me so many times. If I lost control, I would only hurt myself.

I pulled myself together. Let's get something on the table," I said. Everyone pitched in. The food served wasn't quite what the menu described, but when I told my guests what had happened there was chorus of surprise. "If this is what your cook gives you when he's drunk," someone exclaimed "what must he provide when sober!"

The relief in my laughter must have sounded a little hysterical. My perspective restored, I realized that a dinner party, however important, is not the pivot of existence.

To retain a sense of proportion is as important as being able to keep one's heart free from hatred. For all of us, no matter what our work, the advice Gandhiji gave me is meaningful, 'No one can harm you but yourself.'

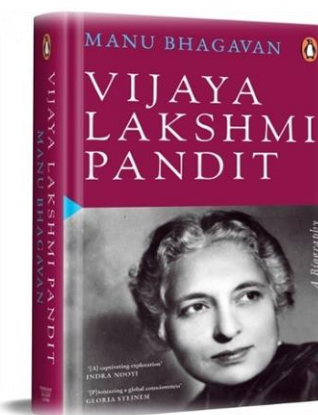
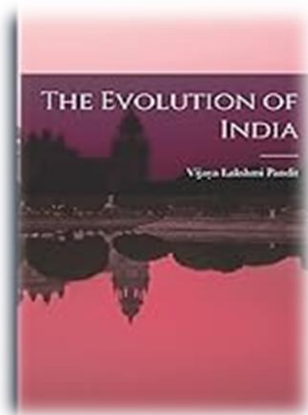
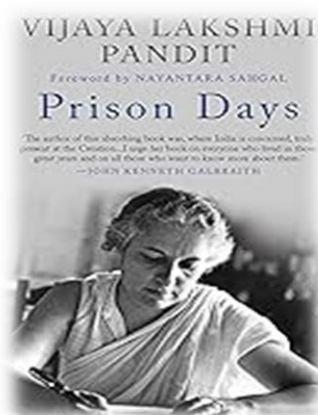
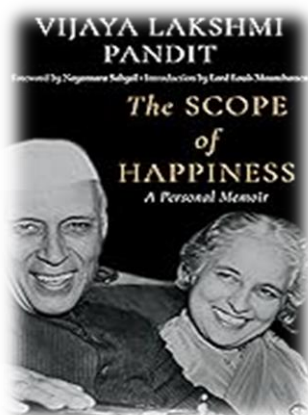


\* Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, one of Jawaharlal Nehru's sisters, wrote this article for the Digest in 1955 when she was High Commissioner for India in the UK. She died in 1990.

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[Kindl visit the Web Link](#)

[https://www.amazon.in/Books-Vijaya-Lakshmi-Pandit/s?rh=n%3A976389031%2Cp\\_27%3AVijaya%2BLakshmi%2BPandit](https://www.amazon.in/Books-Vijaya-Lakshmi-Pandit/s?rh=n%3A976389031%2Cp_27%3AVijaya%2BLakshmi%2BPandit)



[Kindly visit the Web Link](#)

## **Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit** **From the Freedom Struggle to Global Leadership**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9w-Ek3b0WAg> [1:54:00]

Lead presentation by Prof. Manu Bhagavan, specialist on modern India, Professor of History, Human Rights, and Public Policy at Hunter College and the Graduate Center-The City University of New York, and Senior Fellow at the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies. He is the author or editor of eight books, including the critically-acclaimed *The Peacemakers: India and the Quest for One World* and, most recently, *Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: A Biography*.

Chair: Dr. Usha Ramanathan, independent law researcher

Professor Manu Bhagavan will speak on women in leadership, with a focus on Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's contributions to India and the world. He will draw on his extensive experience of India's foreign policy and contributions to the United Nations, and his deeply researched biography of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

# Smt Vijayalakshmi Pandit

## Sixteenth President of AIWC

[https://issuu.com/aiwc/docs/roshni\\_july\\_to\\_september\\_2021/s/14680021](https://issuu.com/aiwc/docs/roshni_july_to_september_2021/s/14680021)

Roshni = July - September 2021

By Smt. Chitra Sarkar, MIC-Roshni

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was born on 18th August 1900. Her parents were originally from Kashmir but had settled in Allahabad, where her father was a prominent lawyer. She was their second child and eldest daughter. They named her Sarup Kumari. She had an older brother named Jawaharlal, and a younger sister, Krishna. The family lived in a lavish, westernized manner, with many servants, in a large joint family. Motilal became a leading figure in the National Movement, and Anand Bhavan, their family mansion, became the centre of swadeshi activities. In 1930 Motilal Nehru donated Anand Bhavan to the country and renamed it Swaraj Bhavan. He then built a smaller home for his family in the same compound and named it Anand Bhavan.

In 1921, Sarup Kumari married a young Maharashtrian barrister named Ranjit Pandit. In accordance with the custom prevailing at that time, her name was changed to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. Ranjit Pandit had been educated at Oxford, Sorbonne and Heidelberg. He spoke eleven languages, played the violin, and was a trained singer. Until 1926, he practiced law in Calcutta, after which he resigned and joined his brother-in-law, Jawahar, in the nationalist movement. The couple had three daughters, Rita, Chandralekha and Nayantara. In 1937, Smt. Pandit was elected to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces and was designated Minister for Local Self-Government and Public Health. She held this post until 1938, when the provisional government resigned to protest British policies.

### AIWC

In December 1941, Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was elected the sixteenth President of The All India Women's Conference, and remained President during 1942-43. Here is an excerpt from her Presidential Address.

"...As women we have a special responsibility cast on us. We must decide whether we shall ally ourselves to the forces of life, or those of death. Are we going to join the group that by their acquiescence make wars possible? Shall we bear sons only that they may murder other women's sons and help to maintain a system which stands self-condemned? Or shall we raise our united voice in favour of a brave new world where human life and human liberty receive the respect which is their due, where progress and security are within the grasp of each individual? The choice is before us. The future, not for women only but for humanity as well, is what the women of today make of it. Let us not treat this matter lightly..."

The period of her Presidency was momentous, both for herself and the country. In March 1942, the British government sent a delegation to India under Sir Stafford Cripps, in what came to be known as the Cripps Mission. The purpose of the mission was to negotiate with Congress to obtain co-operation during the war, in return for devolution and distribution of power from the Crown and the Viceroy, to an elected Indian legislature. The talks failed. After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhiji gave a historic speech in Mumbai on 8th August 1942, calling for an end to British Rule in India. This was called the Quit India Movement. Congress prepared to escalate civil disobedience. Very soon, its leaders were in jail. Ranjit Pandit and Jawaharlal Nehru were incarcerated in Bareilly Jail, while she herself was sent to Naini Central Jail.

As soon as she was released from jail, Smt. Pandit decided to visit Bengal which was in the grip of a horrific man-made famine. It is estimated that three million people died. On her return from Bengal, she found her husband had suffered a heart attack in jail, followed by several complications. On 14th January 1944, Ranjit Pandit passed away. He was just fifty years old. The horrific prison conditions he had endured had destroyed his health. In accordance with the prevailing law, Smt. Pandit did not inherit anything from her husband after his demise.

On observing the plight of our own President, the AIWC started its campaign on the inheritance rights of women.

In 1946, Smt. Pandit was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces.

After Independence, Smt. Pandit joined the diplomatic service. She was India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1949, the United States and Mexico from 1949 to 1951, the United Kingdom as High Commissioner from 1955 to 1961 and Spain from 1958 to 1961.

Smt. Pandit headed the Indian delegation to the United Nations from 1946 to 1968. In September 1952, she was elected President of the UN General Assembly-- the first woman to hold this post. She served as Governor of Maharashtra from 1962 to 1964. In May 1964, her brother Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru passed away. She resigned as Governor of Maharashtra and won election to the Lok Sabha from her brother's former constituency, Phulpur. In 1968, she resigned her parliamentary berth, and stepped back from active politics.

She came out of retirement in 1977 to oppose the policies of Smt. Indira Gandhi in the General Election which brought the Janta Party to power. In 1979, she was appointed the Indian representative to the UN Human Rights Commission. Thereafter she retired from public life and settled in Dehradun in the Himalayan foothills, where she passed away in December 1990 at the age of ninety.

She had blazed a feminist trail throughout her life in an era where the word had not yet been coined, and served her country, and the cause of women's empowerment in a wide spectrum of activities.





**As President of the UN General Assembly.  
As President of The All India Women's Conference**



**As Ambassador to UK**



(☺)(☺)(☺)(☺)(☺)

## How the US press viewed Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the first woman president of UN General Assembly

<https://scroll.in/article/1063629/how-the-us-press-viewed-vijaya-lakshmi-pandit-the-first-woman-president-of-un-general-assembly>

The American press made much of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's [Nan] appointment to the United States. The New York Herald Tribune called her "India's most notable woman," while an analysis in the Daily Boston Globe went further, saying that she was "without question one of the three or four most influential women in the world." The Washington Post pointed to her "remarkable record" and called her a person of "great charm and unusual ability". Gossip columnists fixated on how "strikingly handsome" she was. Some journalists, like those in Black media, heralded her as "one of the world's great enemies of racial discrimination," and a true champion of justice. But others were especially interested in her transfer from the Soviet Union, with several highlighting reports of her disappointment and disillusionment with life there. The Cold War jaundiced their view and they saw a hopeful opportunity to swing India fully to the American side. The Baltimore Sun inversely observed that Nan's commission already reflected the increasing importance that India placed on its relationship with the US and discussed the imperatives of capital investment in the subcontinent. The United Press reported that "[d]iplomatic and official quarters" in the US all "reacted favourably to the appointment", and that "Washington [was] [p]leased."

Just before she began her journey West, she spoke to The New York Times to clarify matters. She acknowledged her frustrations while she had been in Russia but insisted that her interest, and that of her country, was "to avoid entanglement in the 'cold war'", and to "be friends with everybody".

The Times' Robert Trumbull wrote a lengthy feature on her, ostensibly devoted to talking up India's aims for world peace. But a substantial portion of the piece devolved into a discussion of clothing choices. Nan, he titillatingly told his readers, was "a beautiful woman" with a "youthful complexion". "She looks as good in a sari," he emphasised, "as a sari looks on her."

Nan days later told the Indian press that she had several primary objectives while in the US, aside from furthering mutual understanding. She was hoping to increase US capital investment and technical aid, particularly as it related to "food self-sufficiency" and "accelerating industrialisation." In a formal editorial, the Washington Post dubbed her the "hope of the East" and India the "real bridge between the East and West."

Washington was abuzz with the news of Nan's arrival, as people clamoured to know about her comings and goings, which parties were thrown in her honour, and what shows she was headed to see. The adulation she received was equal to that of any celebrity. But underlying it all was a recognition of the immensity of her achievement and the potent possibilities she symbolised for so many. One writer, Malvina Lindsay, wrote "that women are getting restive again. This publicity about Mrs Pandit . . . has started them asking questions." In a remarkable essay, she asserted that women

would no longer settle for being “an adviser, a consultant, an observer . . .” “Mrs Pandit,” she said, “didn’t come here to do research or to smirk at committee meetings.” She was a political leader with the ability to effect real change. Women everywhere were inspired to demand this for themselves now.

The very evening that Lindsay’s column was published, Nan attended the annual dinner of the Women’s National Press Club. The President and Mrs Truman presided over a meal and a series of comedic skits, while also presenting a “Woman of the Year” award to Eleanor Roosevelt. The evening was good fun and facilitated Nan’s introduction to some of Washington’s powerbrokers. Among the most significant attendees was Perle Mesta, who immediately took special notice of Nan. Mesta had only just been featured on the cover of Time Magazine a few weeks previous. A few years later, she would be known as “the hostess with the mostest,” when Irving Berlin penned a song about her for the musical about her life, “Call Me Madam.” Mesta threw the hottest parties in town and was considered one of DC’s most influential socialites.

Several weeks after the Press Club get-together, Attorney General Thomas Clark arranged a programme for charity, headlined by contributions from Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, the country’s top talent. Mesta invited Nan to “join her party” at the event and then to join her for a private supper party thereafter “at a fashionable club”. Nan agreed and stood waiting at the appointed time. She was taken aback when Mesta arrived not in a simple car, but in a full motorcade, complete with a police escort. The night only grew more elaborate from there. “The gowns + jewels + food + drinks were all fantastic,” Nan observed. She admired the exquisite taste and elegance of it all but suddenly grew uneasy. It just seemed too much, especially given all that was happening in the world at that time.

Her feelings recalled her initial reaction to New York when she could not help but compare the glitz, she saw there to the misery of those she had just witnessed starving from the Bengal famine. “Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit – where exactly are you heading for,” she asked as she chided herself to remember who she was, where she came from, and what she stood for.

Nan knew that she had a special responsibility to speak out on all of this. “I think that [it] is very pleasant to attend so many official functions and dinners and cocktail parties and so on, but I think they might easily impair one’s health and also get in the way of objectives which one wants to carry out,” she announced in a radio interview. In another engagement, she grew specific about one issue she cared about deeply. “Too many sugar things are said in the world today, and I am surfeited with them,” she declared. There was “discrimination against women” in the United States, as elsewhere. Women needed things to change and deserved the positions of leadership to make it happen, she said

About a month after the big charity event, Perle Mesta was appointed Ambassador to Luxemburg, becoming only the third woman in United States history to hold such a position. Madame Pandit was credited as the catalyst.





# Indian Constitution



# 75

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